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Master thesis

Adaptive Peacebuilding in Mali

- A study on the role of organized criminal groups
in an era of struggling peacebuilding.



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Abstract

Research has concluded that liberal peacebuilding is failing and should be replaced by pragmatic peacebuilding. The shift from liberal to pragmatic peacebuilding has been well-researched and research on the rise of illiberal peace which has gained favourability due to liberal peacebuilding's failings, is gaining traction. However, when it comes to research on the changes in international peacebuilding connected to the increase of organized crime and organized criminal groups (OCGs), there is more research to be made. Since the world is going through rapid changes with increasingly complex conflicts where organized crime and criminal groups play a more prominent role, the need for research on how pragmatic peacebuilding can address OCGs to meet the needs of conflict-affected countries is the focal point of this thesis. Thus, this research investigates how international peacebuilders can shift toward pragmatic peacebuilding by investigating the role of organized criminal groups in international peacebuilding operations, utilizing the case of Mali with the UN peace operation MINUSMA and the EU capacity-building mission EUCAP Sahel Mali. Through semi-structured interviews of personnel from MINUSMA and EUCAP Sahel Mali, this research has contributed to how international peacebuilders in Mali perceive the role of OCGs in peacebuilding contexts and contributed to a better understanding of how international peacebuilding can cope with the increasing existence of OCGs in peacebuilding. The adaptive peacebuilding approach was applied to the findings which showcased how international peacebuilders in Mali struggle to adapt to the uncertainty related to OCGs and struggle to have a structured engagement with local communities and enable institutional learning to support locally owned peace. The study also found how international peacebuilders in Mali were stuck in a liberal peacebuilding mindset of solving problems and conflicts instead of locating national and local means for change that can better create a resilient, sustained peace.

Key words

Organized Criminal Groups, Peacebuilding, Peace Operations, Organized Crime, Adaptive Peacebuilding, Mali



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List of Abbreviations

ACM: Authoritarian conflict management

AQIM: al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

EUCAP Sahel Mali: European Mission for Capacity Building in Mali

FC-G5S: G5 Sahel Joint Force

HCUA: the High Council for the Unity of Azawad

HRV: Human rights violation(s)

JNIM: Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin

(UN) MINUSMA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

MNLA: the Coordination of the Azawad National Liberation Movement

OCG(s): Organized criminal group(s)

OC: Organized crime

PMC: Private military company

PoC: Protection of civilians

SRSG: the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

TOC: Transnational organized crime



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1 Introduction

Have you noticed? The world is changing.

The war in Ukraine has made it impossible for the international community to ignore the current hegemonic shift and the need for adaptability. Beyond Russia's invasion of Ukraine and disruption of the world order, the World Bank announced in their 2018 report *Pathways for Peace* that violent conflict and terrorism have increased over the past 10 years. To make matters worse violence is increasingly becoming more intricate with a larger number of armed groups, more prevalence of organized crime and increased one-sided violence against civilians (World Bank 2018; Pettersson et al. 2021).

The world is up in arms. Discussions on peace and peacebuilding are not the most prioritized. Yet the need for peacebuilding is ultimately quite clear. There is just one problem.

International peacebuilding is struggling.

That is, peacebuilding is going through a transformation from liberal to pragmatic peacebuilding (Wiuff & Stepputat 2018). In other words, the move from peacebuilding focused on democratic institution-building, marketization and a top-down approach led by Western values and norms of what constitutes a functioning and just society (see Paris 2004) to peacebuilding focused on the practical factors and forces for peace found among the conflict-affected locals and nationals (see Öjendal et al. 2021). In essence, scholars are increasingly debating the effectiveness of liberal peacebuilding. It has been criticized for its ineffectiveness, rigidity, lack of local ownership and top-down approach (Paris 2004; Paffenholz 2021; Mac Ginty & Sanghera 2012; Randazzo 2021; Cárdenas & Olivius 2021; Jarstad & Sisk 2008), as well as creating a global hegemony based on Western liberal ideals of what constitutes peace and conflict (Autesserre 2017), leading to the conclusion that liberal peacebuilding must be replaced by more



pragmatic peacebuilding to remedy the problem. Others argue that the crisis of liberal peacebuilding has resulted in illiberal peacebuilding, where instead of the liberal peacebuilding doctrine's cornerstones of democratic principles, human rights, diplomacy and rule of law, the use of authoritarian conflict management (ACM) is chosen to suppress conflict in favour of 'illiberal peace' (Lewis et al. 2018).

Where then does peacebuilding stand in a world seemingly incessant on continuing the path towards further armed conflict and violence with increasing numbers of armed and criminal groups?

This question remains as conflict rages on in several countries such as Myanmar, Syria, Nicaragua and not to say the least Mali, where authoritarian practices and state coercion are arguably the chosen methods for conflict management.

In Mali, violence and terrorism have increased despite the 9-year-long UN peace operation MINUSMA and the French-led international military counterterrorism interventions Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane. The current transitional government that took power through a military coup d'état in 2021 has since criticised the international community for its ineffectiveness to bring stability and security to Mali (ICG 2022). They have in turn invited the Russian PMC, the Wagner Group, to assist the Malian armed forces with just that. Mali has argued they have no choice since Western states and institutions have not delivered on their promises (Elischer 2022; ICG 2022). It is a hard argument to counter considering the long presence of Western-led liberal peacebuilding in the country. Conversely, the introduction of illiberal peacebuilding and conflict management has resulted in killings and other human rights abuses (OHCHR 2021; Human rights watch 2022a; Human rights watch 2022b) that will most likely not result in sustainable peace due to social grievances and root causes remaining unaddressed (Lewis et al. 2018; Gunnarson 2020). The fact remains that Mali has struggled with organized criminal groups (OCGs) with strong ties to



distinguished politicians, military officers, paramilitaries and terrorist groups for decades (Gberie 2016; Tinti 2022). Malian-based OCGs evidently collaborate with multiple players due to mutual profit.

The outcomes of the illiberal form of conflict management chosen by the Malian government remain to be seen. What is evident is that the Government of Mali has grown tired of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm of democratic principles, dialogue and stark adherence to human rights, thus moving away from Western ideals of what constitutes peace and security. Mali is becoming another state that questions liberal peacebuilding and the international community led by Western liberal ideals and norms.

The prevalence and importance of OCGs in Mali can thus not be understated. They have been a prominent player in Mali's economic, social and political space for decades due to historical trade routes being used for illicit businesses (Micallef et al. 2019; Gberie 2016) and played a role during the civil war which affects Malian politics to this day (Tinti 2022, p. 7-8). In fact, OCGs became a shadow player in the civil war and 2015 peace agreement, '*Accord Pour la Paix et la Reconciliation au Mali*' (Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali) or the Algiers Agreement for short (Tinti 2022, p.8). In modern-day Mali, OCGs, therefore, are complex and hard to distinguish from violent extremists and terrorists, civilians trying to find livelihood in an impoverished country, and opportunistic armed groups.

What is clear is that Mali has a major problem with instability, insecurity, violence, terrorism, and the prevalence of TOC run by OCGs. It is also clear that Mali's current government is moving away from the international community led by Western values and liberal peacebuilding, towards the upcoming hegemonic powers and illiberal peacebuilding. This makes it difficult for peacebuilding actors such as the UN, EU, and Western states to actively engage in peacebuilding in Mali since their mandates follow the liberal peacebuilding doctrine. They follow said doctrine because the illiberal peacebuilding doctrine ignores what the West considers vital values, such as



democratic principles, human rights, and rule of law. Yet these are the exact components which the Malian government considers toothless against the violent and crime-riddled context of Mali.

How then can international peacebuilding adapt to the current environment where it is increasingly viewed as void by post-conflict and conflict-ridden states such as Mali?

1.1 Research gap

Thania Paffenholz (2021) and Roland Paris (2004) criticise the utopic perspective of liberal peacebuilding and its reliance on already established strong state institutions in a post-conflict setting. The critique is valid considering the damage caused to state institutions during and after conflicts. The idea of functioning elections as the final step of peacebuilding, found in liberal peace theory, becomes naïve due to the weakness of post-conflict state institutions. A sentiment supported by Jarstad and Sisk (2008) who found that war-democracy trajectories often result in the reignition of conflict instead of peace.

Even the UN has started moving away from its original post-Cold War era of liberal peacebuilding. The organization has acknowledged the need for more flexible and transformative peacebuilding capable of adjusting to individual conflict dynamics and understanding the weak institutional base of post-conflict states (UN 2015a). The question remains, however, how peacebuilding shall revolutionize itself. Better yet, if the practice and concept in fact will survive at all and, if so, how peace should be built successfully and resiliently in increasingly violent and conflict-ridden contexts.

The area of liberal peacebuilding and its pragmatic turn has been well-researched, though scholars have still not been able to pinpoint a new pragmatic operationalism for peacebuilding. For instance, how peacebuilding shall function in contexts of violence and not in an absence of violence, as often imagined in traditional peacebuilding, is still unanswered (Öjendal et



al. 2021). In correlation, despite the connection between violent conflict and organized crime (Steenkamp 2017; Felbab-Brown 2009; Felbab-Brown, Trinkunas & Hamid 2018) there has been little research on how international peacebuilding address OCGs in their work (Cockayne & Lupel 2009). This is despite the increasing prevalence of organized crime in conflicts and post-conflict settings where peacebuilding is practised (World Bank 2018; Pettersson et al. 2021) and how organized crime is more recognized to fuel conflicts (Steenkamp 2017, p. 2). Peace scholars have, as mentioned, been diligently researching the changing attitudes towards peacebuilding and its need for change. But when it comes to cases of illiberal peace and OCGs in peacebuilding settings scholars tend to avoid them or use simplified conceptual frameworks (Lewis et al. 2018, p. 487; Steenkamp 2011 & 2017). Moreover, although peacebuilders have adopted new ‘turns’ of peacebuilding to remedy liberal peacebuilding shortcomings the result is still not optimized (Öjendal et al. 2021, p. 270). This leaves peacebuilders forced to continue using the liberal peacebuilding model although aware of its shortcomings (Autesserre 2017, p. 126).

As indicated, OCGs have a strong impact on conflict and post-conflict institutions. Christina Steenkamp (2011 & 2017) argues that OCGs are good at building institutions which grant them political, social and economic legitimacy among the public. Examples can be seen in Mexico with the cartels (Aguirre & Leco 2020, p. 159) and Mali where armed groups affiliated with TOC offer much-needed livelihood opportunities (Tinti 2022). Removing the illicit institutions upon which civilians depend can therefore be quite disruptive as it removes vital livelihoods and social functions (Steenkamp 2011 & 2017; Felbab-Brown 2009). Furthermore, Felbab-Brown (2009) found in her research on Afghanistan how counterinsurgencies often used in stabilization missions have resulted in the opposite effect on security and development.

Johan Karlsrud (2019) argues that UN peace operations increasingly have become stabilization missions aimed at the protection of civilians (PoC)



rather than peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions. In stabilization missions, counterinsurgencies against TOC are not uncommon. The MINUSMA mandate also clearly dictates how the mission should combat and prevent TOC (UN Security Council 2022). Karlsrud (2019) has also found that the focus on stabilization is hindering peace operations from conducting peacebuilding.

In essence, the focus on stabilization and combatting illicit institutions has resulted in a negative impact on the liberal peacebuilding mandate. Thus, it is clear an adaptive and pragmatic approach by peacebuilders is necessary to better address the implications of OCGs. Cedric De Coning (2018) presents his adaptive peacebuilding framework that gives peacebuilders the opportunity to be less goal-oriented and work according to the ‘means or process’ of peacebuilding where local contextualization of peace can be better utilized. Yet, his research has not elaborated on how international peacebuilders can adapt their peacebuilding methods to the increasing existence of OCGs, despite their clear impact and importance to the peacebuilding context.

In other words, there is a gap in the peacebuilding research on how peacebuilding can address OCGs in the increasingly complex contexts peacebuilders work.

This thesis aims to contribute to this research gap by utilizing the case of Mali and the UN peace operation MINUSMA and the EU training mission EUCAP Sahel Mali to investigate the role of OCGs in international peacebuilding operations. Based on the research gap there is a need for international peacebuilding to move away from the liberal peacebuilding model and investigate the increasing role of OCGs in peacebuilding contexts to reach sustainable peace.



1.2 Research questions

The role of organized criminal groups (OCG) in the peacebuilding context has been presented as an important topic to research. The shift from liberal peacebuilding to pragmatic peacebuilding has as mentioned been well-researched with the conclusion that the move is crucial and supported by peace experts and practitioners but is hampered by the lack of a functioning operationalization of the pragmatic doctrine. Adaptive peacebuilding has been presented by Cedric De Coning (2018) as a promising example of how to operationalize it. However, amid the scholarly debate international peacebuilders continue to work in increasingly complex contexts filled with violence and organized crime run by OCGs. As such international peacebuilding must move away from the liberal peacebuilding model and investigate the increasing role of OCGs in peacebuilding contexts to effectively operationalize pragmatic peacebuilding. This thesis, therefore, aims to investigate how international peacebuilders can shift toward pragmatic peacebuilding by investigating the role of organized criminal groups in international peacebuilding operations. By interviewing peacebuilders from MINUSMA and EUCAP Sahel Mali to gauge the perceived role of OCGs in peacebuilding contexts, a better understanding of how international peacebuilding can cope with the increasing existence of OCG in peacebuilding can be gained. The adaptive peacebuilding approach will be used as a guide to investigate how international peacebuilding can move towards a sustained peace instead of the illiberal peace alternative to liberal peace that seems to be rising globally.

The following research questions will guide the research:

- What form of peacebuilding does international peacebuilders in Mali practice in relation to organized criminal groups?
 - How do *structured engagement* and *institutional learning* happen in relation to organized criminal groups?



- How do international peacebuilders meet the *uncertainty* of organized criminal groups in their work context in Mali?
- In what way are *local ownership* and *local participation* incorporated into the peacebuilding process?
- How do international peacebuilders in Mali *shift focus* from the ‘*end goals*’ of peacebuilding to the ‘*means of conducting and institutionalizing*’ peacebuilding?

1.3 Structure

The thesis structure first introduces peacebuilding and why it is failing then continues with an introduction of Cedric De Coning’s adaptive peacebuilding approach (2018) as the analytical framework. The methodology of a deductive, qualitative single-case study will be introduced next followed by the case of Mali and its issue with insecurity and intricate situation of OCGs and terrorism. Lastly, an introduction of the findings and analysis of the data will be given, before a conclusion of the main findings is presented.

2 Peacebuilding, ‘ma chère’, do not fail me now

This chapter introduces a more in-depth explanation of liberal peacebuilding and why it is failing. The chapter showcases how illiberal peacebuilding is on the rise and why. The reader will be further introduced to scholars’ emphasis on the need for pragmatic peacebuilding. How peacebuilding is forced to work in violent contexts and how stabilization missions have become a prominent part of peacebuilding missions. The chapter ends with a precursor to the analytical framework consisting of Cedric de Coning’s adaptive peacebuilding.



2.1 Liberal, illiberal, or pragmatic peacebuilding?

Peacebuilding can be described as the practice (and theory) which links peace, development and security together. It was first coined by Galtung (1976) and further established by scholars like Lederach (1997). However, peacebuilding first became a global policy practice when Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced it in his *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992. In the *Agenda for Peace*, peacebuilding is described as the action “to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict” (cited from UN 1992, p. 5).

According to scholars, peacebuilding is the action to build upon the peace created through peacemaking and preserved by peacekeeping (Darby & Mac Ginty 2008; Reychler 2020). However, studies on peacebuilding showcase how peacebuilding occurs before, during and after conflict for instance due to the prevalence of violence and, thus, the absence of peace (Öjendal et al. 2021). Despite the emphasis on post-conflict environments from Boutros-Ghali.

In sum, peacebuilding is a broad institutionalized practice working with economic, political, social, environmental, humanitarian, cultural and human rights-based actions aimed at creating sustainable peace (Öjendal et al 2021; Currie-Alder 2014; Reychler 2020, p. 273). It involves actions such as capacity-building, state-building, socio-economic projects, and development programs aimed at improving access and quality of public goods such as justice, security, economic development, social justice and gender equality (Currie-Alder 2014; Mac Ginty & Sanghera 2012). Peacebuilding is also heavily influenced by liberal democracy, institutions, rule of law and marketization as means to acquire sustainable peace (Paris 2004; Jarstad & Sisk 2008; Öjendal et al. 2021). Hence the term liberal peacebuilding.

Liberal peacebuilding is essentially the practice of building peace by liberating states from conflict through democracy, neo-liberalism, and free



markets using concepts like state-building, good governance and democratization (Paris 2004; Jarstad & Sisk 2008). Liberal peacebuilding albeit criticized (see e.g., Paffenholz 2021) is the common doctrine for international peacebuilding.

As perhaps predicted, peacebuilding is mainly associated with a top-down approach through international agencies, states and organizations (Currie-Alder et al. 2014, p. 373-374; Paris 2004; Darby & Mac Ginty 2008) but is also a concept utilized by local grassroots initiatives, such as women groups and indigenous communities (Chitando 2020; Randazzo 2021). Albeit said grassroots peacebuilders may not always follow the traditional perspective of peacebuilding their efforts are of interest to achieve local ownership of peace. In other words, their efforts are of interest to support sustainable peace: when society's institutions are strong enough to prevent direct violence and peacefully handle structural and cultural violence through its judicial, political, economic, and social institutions (IEP 2022, p. 61; 73). Nonetheless, scholars have found that local grassroots peace initiatives often are disregarded or not recognized as peacebuilding, despite the continued call for increased local ownership and adherence to local perspectives (Cárdenas & Olivius 2021; Randazzo 2021; UN 2015a). This implies the strong external and Western ownership of what constitutes peace and, more importantly, how peace is achieved.

Furthermore, the notion that democratization will build peace due to the theory of how democratic states do not go to war with other democracies still lingers within the practice of peacebuilding. This is despite the criticism by Roland Paris in his book *At War's End* (2004) which argued against peacebuilders' idealistic hope for democratization as a peacebuilding tool and their reliance on pre-existing state institutions in post-conflict countries. Jarstad and Sisk (2008) further proved how democratization did not promote peace in a war-to-democracy thematic approach. Instead, they found that the transition from war to democracy and the transition from war to peace required contradicting actions (Jarstad & Sisk 2008). Essentially the efforts



into building a democratic state are so intrusive to the fragile post-conflict setting that they would disrupt the peace. Jarstad and Sisk (2008) found that the democratic process often caused political violence due to its disruptive nature to the already fragile social and political dynamics in post-conflict countries. The policy to build peace through democracy, as commonly practised and envisioned by peacebuilders, would not only be idealistic but counterproductive.

The problems and counterproductivity of liberal peacebuilding have resulted in post-conflict countries losing faith in its promise of helping them reach stability and sustainable peace (Lewis et al. 2018). As mentioned, liberal peacebuilding focuses on building ‘copies’ of Western democracies through liberal democracy and marketization (see Paris 2004 & Paffenholz 2021). In other words, the strong Western influence on how peace and a functioning state should look is evidently clear in liberal peacebuilding. Scholars have also suggested the neo-colonial aspect of liberal peacebuilding and how it damages local ownership in favour of continued Western political and economic hegemony (Duffield 2007; Pugh 2005; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2015).

Lewis et al. (2018) present the concept of authoritarian conflict management (ACM). ACM is a form of illiberal peacebuilding aimed at suppressing conflict rather than solving its root causes, by utilizing authoritarian mechanisms. According to Lewis et al., the shift towards illiberal peacebuilding started in 2000 and has gradually increased due to the crisis found within liberal peacebuilding. They suggest illiberal peacebuilding has increased by a rise in military victories in armed conflicts but also because negotiations in post-conflict countries result in so-called ‘frozen conflicts’ (Lewis et al. 2018, p. 489). In other words, a conflict which has a negotiated peace agreement that fails to be implemented. Leaving the country in a frozen state regarding peace, development, and security. Such a frozen conflict can be seen in Mali where the Algiers Peace Agreement still has implementation difficulties while violence continues to plague the country.



The high prevalence of military coups in Mali with 2 in the span of 1 year highlight the turbulence left after the peace settlement in 2015 which followed the liberal peacebuilding doctrine.

The rise of illiberal peacebuilding can be traced to the hegemonic shift where Russia and China have gained more power. Both states have given diplomatic, political and military support to countries opting for ACM such as Syria, Myanmar, Sudan, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe (Lewis et al. 2018, p. 489). Here the Russian Wagner Group plays a role in giving privately driven military support to authoritarian states willing to commit human rights abuses and break international law in favour of illiberal peace. One of the states that have invited and accepted military support from the Wagner Group is Mali which indicates the Malian state's move from liberal to illiberal peacebuilding (Elischer 2022; ICG 2022).

In their article '*Introducing Hybrid Peace Governance: Impact and Prospects of Liberal Peacebuilding*' Jarstad and Belloni (2012, p. 2) address the existence of peace under "illiberal norms, institutions, and practices" which has a "decisive role in political, economic, and social life". Meaning that illiberal peace has a major impact on society at large. Despite these findings countries like Mali are willing to pursue illiberal peace instead of liberal in the hopes of gaining stability and opportunities to develop. Jarstad and Belloni (2012, p. 2) continue that such peace will risk falling back into conflict due to the perceived absence of legitimacy. Richmond (2015, p. 59) adds that the risk of structural violence remaining and thus resulting in negative peace is high. Leaving the increase of ACM and illiberal peacebuilding among conflict and post-conflict countries a worrisome trend if proven true. It once more promotes the question of how states like Mali can obtain their desired stability and succeed in their pursuit of sustainable peace. For Mali, it poses the added question if ACM and illiberal peace can quell the already prominent structural violence (Gunnarson 2020).



As already mentioned, the practice of liberal peacebuilding has been heavily criticized for its top-down approach, lack of local ownership, and ignorance of complex conflict dynamics (Paris 2004; Autesserre 2017). Suggesting Mali's choice of leaving liberal peacebuilding may be an understandable self-preserving action.

Thania Paffenholz (2021) takes a step further and strongly questions the legitimacy of liberal peacebuilding for its fiercely linear approach. The traditional concept of liberal peacebuilding, as critically explained by Paffenholz (2021), is the idea of achieving multi-party democratic systems mirroring developed western countries' rule of law, human rights and free markets through ceasefire, (pre-)negotiations, and finally internationally supported elections and liberal institution-building. Paffenholz (2021) follows the example of Paris (2004) criticizing the utopic perspective of liberal peacebuilding and its reliance on already established strong state institutions in a post-conflict setting.

The critique is valid considering the damage caused to state institutions during and after conflicts. Making the idea of functioning elections as the final step of peacebuilding naïve due to the weakness of post-conflict state institutions. A sentiment supported by Jarstad and Sisk's findings of democracy and peace. Even the UN has started moving away from its original post-Cold War era of liberal peacebuilding and acknowledged the need for more flexible and transformative peacebuilding capable of adjusting to individual conflict dynamics and understanding the weak institutional base of post-conflict states (UN 2015a).

Yet, the question remains.

How shall peacebuilding revolutionize itself? Will it survive at all or is the rise of illiberal peacebuilding about to take its place due to its obvious failings? And lastly, as is of interest to this study. How will peacebuilding adapt to the increasingly violent and crime-ridden contexts it operates in?



2.2 The way forward?

As previously mentioned, peacebuilding is a complex, broad and highly contested practice. Yet, it has since the 90's been the most prominent tool, in various shapes and forms, used by the international community to build peace. The criticism leans heavily toward the poor understanding of conflict dynamics (Autesserre 2017). Poor utilization of local peacebuilding perspectives and actors (Randazzo 2021; Cárdenas & Olivius 2021). A too heavy-handed top-down approach and lack of local ownership (Paris 2004; Mac Ginty & Sanghera 2012). The reliance on swift and resilient institution-building (Jarstad & Sisk 2008; Paris 2004), and a rigid, overly linear form of peacebuilding lacking the necessary flexibility and transformative qualities (Paffenholz 2021; De Coning 2018a).

Mac Ginty and Sanghera (2012) further argued for the transformation of peacebuilding through hybridization due to the evident struggles of liberal peacebuilding. They argued peacebuilders should consider building a 'hybrid peace' by focusing more on local institutions and ownership as locals are the 'real forces of peace'. In other words, the locals in post-conflict countries are essentially the most affected by the built peace and, thereby, should be in control of it. Hence, the importance to utilize their institutions and perspectives of peace would arguably be the best option for sustainable peace. A sentiment supported by Johnson and Hutchinson's study of local political systems in Nigeria found how hybrid political systems emerged in local communities when faced with centralized political systems. In fact, Johnson and Hutchinson found higher legitimacy and state trust when a mix of informal and formal institutions was allowed (Johnson & Hutchinson 2012). Arguably locals take peacebuilding initiatives regardless of international actors' involvement (see e.g. Chitando 2020) and sometimes find international peacebuilding a hindrance to local initiatives (Autesserre 2017). Yet the question is if the international community are aware of its capabilities or dare let go of its own external power of peace.



The rise of illiberal peacebuilding and the increasing distrust in liberal peacebuilding among post-conflict states suggests the opposite.

Despite the international community's distancing from strict liberal peacebuilding (UN 2015a) and its acceptance of a pragmatic shift (Wiuff & Stepputat 2018) the fact remains that an optimal pragmatic peacebuilding doctrine has yet to emerge (Öjendal et al. 2021, p. 270). As a result, this forces peacebuilders to continue to work with mandates following mainly liberal peacebuilding processes (Autesserre 2017, p. 126). In other words, the international community is aware of the problem and the shifting hegemonic order funnelling the rise of illiberal peacebuilding. Yet as explained by Duffield (2007), Pugh (2005) and Richmond and Mac Ginty (2015) the current economic world order continues to exploit the Global South. It also gives an incentive for the Western-led community to preserve the status quo of peacebuilding.

Where do the conflict and post-conflict states then find themselves in this predicament? Well, as has been highlighted by Lewis et al. (2018) they turn to ACM and illiberal peace.

2.2.1 Stabilization instead of peacebuilding

The increase in peacekeeping missions focused on stabilization and counterterrorism highlights the expectation of peacebuilding missions to be actively involved in armed conflicts (Karlsrud 2019; Curran & Hunt 2020). Put in other words, the increase of conflict and the need for peacebuilding in violent contexts puts the practice at a disadvantage since peacebuilding still follows the thematic idea of liberal peace. In which peacebuilding builds sustainable peace in post-conflict environments. An idea that currently does not reflect reality where peacebuilding increasingly works in contexts of organized violence (Öjendal et al. 2021).

The increase in peacekeeping missions does not exclude the existence of peacebuilding. But it does bode the question as to whether peacekeeping



missions are expected to conduct peacebuilding while upholding military actions against armed groups, performing counterterrorism, and preventing TOC simultaneously. Which goes against the intended practice of post-conflict peacebuilding. In fact, many actions under stabilization and counterterrorism missions fall under and have been labelled as peacebuilding since the 2010s (Karlsrud 2019). Further indicating that peacebuilding is not a practice done in absence of violence or armed conflict. Coincidentally what constitutes peacebuilding is increasingly questioned due to the occurrence of various violence and tumultuous social and political changes it works in (Cárdenas & Olivius 2021; Nilsson & Gonzáles Marín 2021; Forde, Kappler & Björkdahl 2021).

The move away from traditional peacebuilding missions toward stabilization and counterterrorism missions may be explained by the increase in armed conflict and violence. A recognition of the need for peacebuilding to be incorporated into stabilization and crime prevention to achieve its goal, and open doors for interlinked peace actors¹ to confer (De Coning 2018b; Bachmann 2014). Hence a desire by the international community to support post-conflict countries in their time of need. Yet scholars have found the increasing emphasis on stabilization in fact has led to higher insecurity, distrust towards national state institutions, suspicion toward international actors and even potentially detrimental to the UN's legitimacy as a peacebuilding agent (Karlsrud 2019; Kfir 2018; Curran & Hunt 2020). Findings that are backed up by the rise of illiberal peacebuilding and preference for ACM (Lewis et al. 2018).

Furthermore, critical research has questioned whether the shift to stabilization is with post-conflict countries' best interests at heart or if it aims to increase Western states' security against terrorism and violent extremism (Karlsrud 2019; Kfir 2018; Curran & Hunt 2020). In other words, upholding

¹ Humanitarian, development and security actors.



Western interests and security over the interests and security of the people in post-conflict and conflict-ridden countries. Moreover, focusing on increasing the security sector in countries riddled with violence, as common in stabilization missions, has been proven to create less inclusive peace and is detrimental to locals' own pursuit of security as well as undermining the national ownership of peace (Curran & Hunt 2020; Öjendal et al. 2021). In some cases, state security actors are considered security threats and may even draw violence to civilian areas despite their purpose of civilian protection (Nilsson & Gonzáles Marín 2020). In relation to peacebuilding, Johan Karlsrud (2019) advocates that the shift from peacebuilding to stabilization and counterterrorism will encourage recruitment to terrorist groups, garnish oppressive governments, and political unrest. In other words, the opposite of the intended security and peace that the missions aim for. He is supported by Lewis et al. (2018) in how the failings of liberal peacebuilding and the current practice of peacebuilding have led to states turning to ACM and illiberal peace. Thus, creating more oppressive governments.

The rise of illiberal peacebuilding becomes quite understandable from the perspective of conflict and violence-affected states. When the intended peace operations that promise stabilization and ultimately sustainable peace through a Western-led model fail. It is hard to hold states and their public at fault for looking elsewhere. Conversely, how can peacebuilding fulfil its goal of assisting post-conflict countries in building sustainable peace when its understanding of violence seemingly excludes large parts of post-conflict structural and cultural violence? Even more so with the emphasis on stabilization and counterterrorism over a peacebuilding practice that focuses on the root causes of conflict?

2.2.2 Peacebuilding in a conflict environment

Öjendal et al. (2021) argued in their introduction to the *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding's* special issue on *Peacebuilding Amidst Violence*, that violence should be viewed 'as a broad, open concept' which



takes various forms of violence and other forms of harm into consideration. The special issue highlights violence such as repression from poverty (Nilsson & Gonzáles Marín 2021), detrimental gendered practices and ideologies (Cárdenas & Olivius 2021) and discrimination and exclusion based on class (Forde, Kappler, & Björkdahl 2021). With such a definition of violence, peacebuilding would theoretically be able to circumvent the current issues of linear and short interventions which do not take existing forms of violence into account. Likewise, it would refocus peacebuilding on structural and cultural root causes of conflict to better build institutions capable of handling the erupting violence it is expected to work in/with. Regardless of the international community's policy of short-term stabilization. Such a practice of peacebuilding would correlate with de Coning's (2016) idea of peacebuilding activities. Which he argues should exist as a flexible supplement to local peacebuilding actors in conflict settings. Furthermore, it would be able to better understand and adapt to local perspectives of security and the need to ensure peace, security and development.

In 2016 the UN moved away from liberal peacebuilding into a doctrine all about *sustaining peace* through Resolution 2282 (UN Security Council 2016). The UN concluded that sustaining peace is a political and social endeavour. Where local ownership is of high importance (UN 2015b) and standardized solutions and templates must be strictly avoided (Oscar Fernandez-Taranco 2016). In other words, the new *sustaining peace* agenda is acknowledging pragmatic peacebuilding. It argues that the UN no longer shall enforce a liberal model onto post-conflict countries. But instead, assist them in reaching their own locally grown peace. Where international peacebuilders jointly work with local peacebuilders and political actors in structured processes to build on existing forces for peace. Peacebuilding has, thus, moved away from programmed activities assumed to eventually create peace to supporting political and social qualities that sustain peace (De Coning 2018a, p. 303-304). Furthermore, the UN has promised a New Agenda for Peace in 2023 where 'all forms of violence' will be addressed



(UN 2021, p. 6). This means the liberal peacebuilding doctrine is slowly fading away. But as mentioned previously is still lingering in the practice of international peacebuilding as no new practice of pragmatic peacebuilding has yet been operationalized.

Cedric de Coning presents in his article *Adaptive Peacebuilding* (2018) the approach of adaptive peacebuilding. He suggests that adaptive peacebuilding can be a tool for international peacebuilding to implement *sustaining peace* as pragmatic peacebuilding. Where international peacebuilders ‘actively engage in structured processes to prevent conflict and sustain peace’ together with conflict-affected local actors (p. 304-305) For reference, sustain(ed) peace is thus the acknowledgement that peace cannot be sustainable as there are no obsolete solutions to conflict. Therefore, the term sustained peace is deemed more appropriate as you are sustaining peace rather than achieving sustainable peace (p. 312-313). The adaptive peacebuilding approach thus suggests an operationalized version of pragmatic peacebuilding. Which may strengthen international peacebuilding and its legitimacy to the states it aims to support. As well as challenging the rise of illiberal peacebuilding and ACM. It also presents an approach that can help international peacebuilders address OCGs in peacebuilding contexts due to its focus on ‘proactive monitoring and feedback’ which can reveal spoilers and diverging political interests (p. 312). The approach will be further explained in the next chapter: The adaptive peacebuilding approach.

2.3 Let us summarize

So, what have we learned about peacebuilding and why illiberal peacebuilding is seemingly preferred by conflict-affected states?

Well, the liberal peacebuilding doctrine is failing due to its overall linear and top-down approach that does not take local ownership into enough account. Coincidentally, peace operations have increasingly moved to become stabilization missions focused on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. At



the same time, local peacebuilding initiatives are common and practised in violent circumstances. The international peacebuilding community is aware of liberal peacebuilding's failures and desire to use pragmatic peacebuilding instead where local ownership and practical ways to create change for peace is utilized. However, scholars have not been able to give an alternative to international peacebuilders that can be operationalized. This has left them forced to rely on liberal peacebuilding practices with attempts at incorporating local participation and practical strategies borrowed from research. Coincidentally the world is changing drastically with a hegemonic shift and increasingly complex peacebuilding context with a higher prevalence of violence and organized crime. In this setting international peacebuilders are trying to find ways to practice functioning peacebuilding that supports sustainable peace. The need to assist international peacebuilding in the shift to an operationalized pragmatic peacebuilding in relation to organized crime and violence is necessary. This thesis will now attempt to add to the research gap of operationalized pragmatic peacebuilding in relation to the increase of organized crime by elaborating on the adaptive peacebuilding approach's potential usage.

3 The adaptive peacebuilding approach

In this chapter, the approach of adaptive peacebuilding will be introduced. This thesis will use the approach to analyse how international peacebuilders can address organized criminal groups (OCGs) in the peacebuilding process when forced to apply liberal peacebuilding practices due to mandates. The adaptive peacebuilding approach was chosen as it is seen as an operationalized form of pragmatic peacebuilding. This may assist international peacebuilders to reclaim legitimacy and trust from illiberal peacebuilding among states affected by conflict and transnational organized crime.



3.1 Adaptive peacebuilding

Adaptive peacebuilding is an approach aimed at operationalizing pragmatic peacebuilding to reach sustained peace (De Coning 2018a, p. 309). The approach revolves around local ownership and resilience to foster institutional knowledge capable of withstanding violent conflict without external help (De Coning 2018a; 2016). The approach stresses the use of process facilitation as a core activity in all peacebuilding initiatives. That is to promote resilience within social institutions by locating processes of self-organization that can withstand internal and external shocks. A key part of the approach is the emphasis on prevention instead of conflict management. That is to work with change and the prevention of violent conflict rather than against the existence of conflict. As conflict is deemed a necessary component for change according to adaptive peacebuilding (De Coning 2018a, p. 307-314). In the context of OCGs, it would mean not fighting against the existence of OCGs but rather locating social institutions which showcase resilience against the negative effect of organized crime. And in turn, support the change these social institutions can foster to promote sustained peace. The adaptive peacebuilding approach can prove particularly useful to address OCGs given its focus on local ownership in decision-making. It suggests a deep involvement of local societies and communities in all peacebuilding decisions that have not been attempted before (De Coning 2018a, p. 316). Making the adaptive peacebuilding approach a promising tool to address highly adaptable OCGs.

The approach is influenced by complexity theory. From complexity theory, adaptive peacebuilding has taken the concept of how social systems are constantly evolving and adapting to internal and external factors which affect them. Applied to peacebuilding it essentially means that peacebuilding aims to influence attitudes and behaviours in social systems affected by conflict. According to complexity theory, social systems are complex systems and therefore capable of adapting. As such they showcase a capacity for self-



organizing which adaptive peacebuilding suggest can be utilized by peacebuilders to influence pre-existing institutions for peace (p. 305).

When a complex system faces a shock or obstacle it adapts to the changes in its environment. Since the environment cannot, usually, be changed it is the system itself that must. It does so by ‘co-evolving’ with the environment in an endless adaptation process. De Coning calls it an ‘iterative adaptive process’ that utilizes ‘experimentation and feedback to generate knowledge about the system’s environment’ (cited from p. 305). This iterative process of continuous adaptation through experimentation and feedback is what De Coning’s adaptive peacebuilding approach aims to copy and implement in the context of sustained peace (De Coning 2018a). A process which enables adaptation in behaviour and attitudes necessary for sustained peace.

De Coning (2018a) argues that peacebuilding has a successful project and program process in that peacebuilders know how to plan and implement projects and programs. First, an analysis is made of the context, conflict and actors. Then, according to the analysis, a project or program is planned and finalized by its implementation. At the end of the project/program, an evaluation is done to establish whether it was successful or not and if the desired impact can be monitored. Lastly by the evaluation, it is determined whether the project/program shall continue or be cancelled and what appropriate adaptations should be made if it is to continue. As De Coning puts it peacebuilders have already established a good ‘analysis-planning-implementation-evaluation-selection project cycle’. However, he argues they lack sufficient variation, and their selection does not take ‘effect’ into strong enough consideration (p. 306). That is, the need for a large variety of interventions on different levels and thematic areas with a good selection based on long-term effectiveness is lacking. Most of all they are extremely bad when it comes to identifying and abandoning poorly performing initiatives (p. 306). This results in underperforming peacebuilding initiatives continuing despite them not fostering sustained peace and the resources that are given to it could have been laid on indicators for peace instead.



The adaptive peacebuilding approach offers a solution to the issues found in the otherwise well-established initiatives by international peacebuilding. The issues are around variation and selection mainly due to inadequate identification of underperforming initiatives; too little variation and a lacking understanding of which effect is most desirable. Looking at the problems presented the issue seems rooted in a short-term approach. De Coning's adaptive peacebuilding thus suggests peacebuilders use a specific '*structured engagement*' to foster '*institutional learning*' that can create and facilitate adaption (p. 306).

Another key point of the adaptive peacebuilding approach is its recognition that perceived effectiveness is not constant. Essentially that just because an initiative is effective currently does not mean it will be so forever. The adaptive peacebuilding approach stresses the importance of monitoring results. As even the most successful initiatives need diligent monitoring to capture discrepancies and shortcomings which cause undesirable consequences (p. 306). The adaptive peacebuilding approach thereby argues for non-linearity as the success of the initiatives is not constant. Hence not linear. Instead, due to the non-linearity rooted in behaviours and dynamics in complex social systems, the adaptive peacebuilding approach states that monitoring both *intended results* and *unintended consequences* of initiatives is crucial. Furthermore, preparedness among peacebuilders to handle the negative consequences of the initiative and adapt to the monitored situation by changing their ongoing initiatives according to the monitored consequences is a must (p. 307).

In line with monitoring adaptive peacebuilding also stress the necessity of *local ownership* and *local representation* in peacebuilding initiatives. From the stage of analysis all the way up until evaluation and selection. According to adaptive peacebuilding sustained peace can *only be achieved from within* and thus the local perspectives must always be present in peacebuilding initiatives. The *aims and objectives* of the local communities as well as their *needs, concerns and interests* must be part of the theory of change utilized by



initiatives to create an institutionalized peace. Thus, the choices being made throughout peacebuilding initiatives should be taken together with local stakeholders. As such adaptive peacebuilding promotes a structured learning process with conflict-affected parts of society or community (ibid.).

3.1.1 Uncertainty and adaptation

Adaptive peacebuilding acknowledges that *uncertainty* will always be part of complex systems. Uncertainty is thus not caused by knowledge-fatigued analysis or poor planning and implementation (De Coning 2018a, p. 309). Moreover, as adaptive peacebuilding acknowledges peacebuilding as working in and with complex social systems uncertainty will always be unavoidable. As such international peacebuilders must always work alongside uncertainty.

The swift changes in conflicts and the appropriate tools

The unavoidability of uncertainty means that traditional tools such as conflict analysis and needs assessments cannot give peacebuilders a complete understanding of the context they envision to change. The adaptive peacebuilding approach stresses how conflicts can *change suddenly and unexpectedly*. Showcasing the need to understand how non-linear and dynamic the behaviours of complex social systems are especially under stressors of conflict (De Coning 2018a, p. 309-310).

The abovementioned explanation is the reason why adaptive peacebuilding suggests traditional tools such as conflict analysis and needs assessments should be used as ‘*continuous iterative processes*’ and not as a predetermined design for a linear approach to peacebuilding initiatives (ibid.).

Peacebuilding Policy

On a policy level, adaptive peacebuilding suggests a continuation of pre-existing peacebuilding initiatives to influence the complex social system



necessary to garnish the desired change. The adaptive peacebuilding approach as mentioned highlights experimentation and the exploration of *local participation* that enables adaption within societies and communities affected by conflict. It also implores multilevel initiatives to be taken simultaneously and with adequate information and knowledge sharing. Peacebuilding initiatives outside of adaptive peacebuilding already use multi-thematic initiatives simultaneously (De Coning 2018a, p. 310). This is a practice that adaptive peacebuilding argues should continue however adaptive peacebuilding would have these multi-thematic initiatives in close collaboration with both local and national communities, where the communities would be deeply involved with the monitoring, evaluation and selection of the initiatives. The adaptive peacebuilding approach argues it would ensure the discontinuation of underperforming initiatives in a swifter and more locally owned manner. As well as structural adjustments and necessary expansions of initiatives were done appropriately. De Coning (2018) argues such an iterative process would result in much-needed structural adaptation. As well as garnish a better understanding of how social systems are constantly changing thus international peacebuilders must ‘*co-evolve*’ with them (p. 310-311).

Politics is Peacebuilding

In the realm of *uncertainty*, politics plays a key role. The adaptive peacebuilding approach suggests a way forward to clarify the murky waters of political interests in peacebuilding contexts. Due to the intricate nature of politics peacebuilding is like all other practices affected by the contradicting interests flourishing at national, local and international levels. The issue of obstruction of well-informed peacebuilding initiatives due to the perception it infringes on specific interests thus makes policy decisions on peacebuilding more political than technical (p. 311).

Adaptive peacebuilding suggests a solution to the political predicament through its recognition that there is no ‘external privileged knowledge’ or



‘predetermined model’ that dictates the best course of action. Enabling local and national interests and perspectives to take a more prominent role in decision-making and thus help avoid the issue of political obstruction. Due to its focus on proactive monitoring and feedback, adaptive peacebuilding can also assist in recognizing differing political interests or identifying spoilers (p. 311-312).

3.1.2 Shifting focus from ‘the ends’ to the ‘means’

The second key component of adaptive peacebuilding is how peacebuilders should shift their focus from the ‘*end goals*’ of peacebuilding to the ‘*means of conducting and institutionalising*’ peacebuilding (De Coning 2018a; 2016).

The never-ending cycle of change

Adaptive peacebuilding recognizes that complex systems are a *never-ending cycle of change*. Meaning changing the attitudes of social systems will forever bear the risk of relapse into the attitudes and behaviours which caused conflict. As such, reaching sustained peace can never have an end goal for peacebuilding. Instead, the focus should lie on the *means for peace*, the attitudes and behaviours which foster peace. In this lies the importance of continued investment in social cohesion which adaptive peacebuilding means must have as a strong and continuous focus (De Coning 2018a, p. 312). In other words, the adaptive peacebuilding approach states that peacebuilders should support *institutional learning* leaving local communities capable of upholding a resilient social cohesion to avoid violent conflict.

Focus on pre-existing local forces for peace

By moving away from the ‘problems of’ and ‘solutions to’ conflict, peacebuilders can focus on the local engagement of communities and stakeholders which the conflict and thus the peacebuilding initiatives affect. Peacebuilders can instead focus their attention on supporting the pre-existing



quality and sustainability of local informal peacebuilding initiatives. Since peacebuilding according to adaptive peacebuilding must be locally institutionalized and sustained peace is achieved from within the social system affected, the approach of supporting local engagement will strengthen the quality of international peacebuilding. Moreover, such an initiative supports local communities' resilience towards shocks and setbacks through the institutionalization of peacebuilding by supporting and stimulating the development of resilient social institutions (De Coning 2018a, p. 313).

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

The shift given by adaptive peacebuilding also entails, and promotes caution towards, the notions of '*best practices*' and '*lessons learned*'. As complex systems are ever-changing, the lessons learned from interventions may prove inaccurate in future similar situations. Thus, the best practices being implemented from the learnt lessons may prove ineffective or even damaging to sustained peace. The risk of spoilers having learnt their own '*lessons learned*' may result in changed strategies on their part that can negatively affect international peacebuilders' best practices. As such the adaptive peacebuilding approach suggests caution when using best practices and applying lessons learned from previous interventions. Instead, it advocates for '*continuous adaptation*' where best practices and lessons learned are viewed as inputs to decision-making rather than standardized procedures (De Coning 2018a, p. 314).

3.1.3 Resilience and change

Lastly, the adaptive peacebuilding approach has a strong emphasis on resilience. What that means, according to the approach, is '*investing in resilience and working with change and not against conflict*' (De Coning 2018a).

The adaptive peacebuilding approach views conflict as a normal and necessary part of society. Essentially the approach accepts the concept that



conflict can be both negative and positive. In other words, it can become destructive and violent, or it can be competitive and constructive. It all boils down to that adaptive peacebuilding supports the ability of communities to handle conflict without violence. Thus, the adaptive peacebuilding approach encourages peacebuilders to work with the changes in society and conflict rather than against conflict to ‘solve’ it (De Coning 2018a, p. 314).

Stress and conflict bring change

Adaptive peacebuilding acknowledges that for a social system to change it must be under stress. The approach also acknowledges that such stress comes from conflict where diverging interests clash resulting in change. The importance is to avoid violent conflict. Where the diverging interests cannot be resolved in a mutually beneficial change but instead parties turn to violence to ensure their interests are met. Instead, *constructive conflict* is desired where a peaceful competition of the diverging interests is held resulting in the evolution and *adaptation of society*. Adaptive peacebuilding emphasises the adaptation occurring during conflict and stresses the importance of conflict for a society to evolve and survive (p. 315). Adaptive peacebuilding, therefore, suggests international peacebuilders work with local stakeholders and the pre-existing dynamics to foster the peaceful institutions already existing. In doing so peacebuilding can be proactive and prevent violent conflict prior to its eruption.

Marginalization and inequalities

The adaptive peacebuilding approach addresses how conflict often erupts due to exclusion, discrimination and marginalization of groups and other inequalities. It also includes how exclusion and social injustice ultimately lead to social and political unrest due to the marginalized groups organizing themselves to demonstrate against injustice. The adaptive peacebuilding approach suggests that due to the complexity of social systems, it adapts only once the cost of maintaining the systematic status quo becomes too high to



continue. At this point, the political elite will either accept the marginalized groups' call for justice or further suppress the public to force submission (De Coning 2018a, p. 315-316). This can be seen in the rise of illiberal peacebuilding where authoritarianism is used to quell conflicts and social unrest in favour of illiberal peace (Lewis et al 2018). Regardless of illiberal peacebuilding's idea of suppression to garnish peace it ignores the *adaptability of social systems* and thus *the adaptability of conflicts*. Since conflicts are social, political and economic in nature they are part of the social system and therefore adapt to suppression. According to adaptive peacebuilding, social and political unrest quickly resorts to violence if further suppression and state coercion occur. This results in an inevitable 'tipping point' where the social system (and its leaders) realizes that exclusion costs more than the benefits of the current social system. At this point, the social system, according to adaptive peacebuilding, adapts to survive (De Coning 2018a, p. 315-316).

As such the core aspect of resilience and non-linear processes in the adaptive peacebuilding approach is exemplified through the argument of how social system always find themselves at a breaking point where it adapts to survive (p. 316). This exemplifies the approach's view on building resilience through social institutions capable of withstanding stressors such as social and political unrest. The approach argues that if international peacebuilders focus on local interests, needs and concerns and support quality engagements for peace, then peacebuilders would enable the prevention of violent conflict and promote sustained peace.

3.2 Usage in the research

The adaptive peacebuilding approach will be applied to this research using these primary concepts found in the theory:

- 1) *Structured engagement* and *institutional learning* in a facilitated iterative adaptive process;



- 2) *Local ownership and local participation* in decision-making throughout the peacebuilding process;
- 3) The *uncertainty* of conflicts and the adaptability of social systems; and
- 4) The shift of focus from the '*end goals*' to the '*means of conducting and institutionalizing*' peacebuilding.

OCGs are highly adaptable, and the adaptive peacebuilding approach presents an interesting tool for international peacebuilders to adapt to the uncertainty and never-ending cycle of change found in conflict environments where OCGs are part of or strongly affect local social systems affected by organized violence. The adaptive peacebuilding approach thus is of interest to apply to a complex peacebuilding environment where OCGs are present, of which Mali has been chosen for this research. The research will thus apply the theoretical ideas of local ownership and local participation in the decision-making in peacebuilding initiatives aimed at these local social systems in Mali. It will also apply the idea of uncertainty argued by adaptive peacebuilding to investigate how well international peacebuilders in Mali adapt to uncertainty connected to OCGs. Structured engagement and institutional learning will be applied to see if it occurs in relation to OCGs in Mali. Lastly, the shift of focus presented in adaptive peacebuilding will be applied to the findings to investigate whether a shift from the 'end goals' to the 'means' of peacebuilding is occurring in Mali connected to OCGs.

4 Methodology

This thesis uses the method of a single-case study with a qualitative and deductive approach using semi-structured interviews. Its aim is to investigate how international peacebuilders can shift toward pragmatic peacebuilding by investigating the role of organized criminal groups in international peacebuilding operations, utilizing the case of Mali with the UN peace operation MINUSMA and EU training program EUCAP Sahel Mali. The



theory applied is the adaptive peacebuilding approach which dictates how conflicts are part of social systems that are ever-changing and thus sustained peace must be built from within, i.e., by the conflict-affected local communities that are part of the social system. In other words, Mali represents the case, OCGs and peacebuilding represent the variables and the adaptive peacebuilding approach represents the theory.

The research is deductive because it ‘draws on what is known about in a particular domain and on relevant theoretical ideas in order to deduce a hypothesis that must then be subjected to empirical scrutiny’ (Bryman 2016, p. 21). In this case, the domain is peace(building) research and the known is that liberal peacebuilding is failing and pragmatic peacebuilding is emerging but contested by illiberal peacebuilding. The theoretical ideas are the adaptive peacebuilding approach and its ideas on social systems’ ever-changing trajectory which can and should be utilized by international peacebuilders to evolve peacebuilding into an operationalized pragmatic practice. Thus, the hypothesis is that the adaptive peacebuilding approach can be the tool for international peacebuilders to operationalize pragmatic peacebuilding to give an alternative to illiberal peacebuilding when facing complex environments of increased organized crime. By interviewing international peacebuilders in Mali their experiences, attitudes and observations on the role of OCGs in the Malian peacebuilding context can be analysed. This is done to gain a better understanding of how international peacebuilding can cope with the increasing existence of OCG in peacebuilding contexts. As the deductive process suggests, the theory is then applied to the collected data to determine what role OCGs have according to international peacebuilders in Mali. In turn, it can be assessed if adaptive peacebuilding can be a helpful tool to operationalize pragmatic peacebuilding by analysing which practice of peacebuilding international peacebuilders use in Mali when faced with OCGs and complex social systems.



This research follows the process of deductive research in how a theory is applied to the data collected from semi-structured interviews. As Bryman explains the deductive and inductive strategies are interlinked. The process of induction is the opposite of deduction as it takes findings and apply them to theory. However, as Bryman exemplifies deduction has a process of induction where at times the findings are the leading aspect of the research and they are instead applied to the theory (Bryman 21-24). As such this research while following a deductive strategy, it has elements of induction.

The case study method was used for its in-depth nature where possibilities and patterns can be explored (Bryman 2016, p. 60). Furthermore, this approach has merits since previous research has not investigated how Mali-based international peacebuilders view the role of OCGs nor how what practice of peacebuilding they implement in relation to criminal groups. SSR was chosen to narrow down the otherwise broad peacebuilding field and due to that UN MINUSMA and EUCAP Sahel Mali both are stabilization missions aiming to enhance security and state capacity.

4.1 Case study

George and Bennet (2005) present case studies as a method to analyse a chosen “aspect of a historical episode” to further develop theories. The cases in question are thus the important aspect rather than the “historical event itself” (2005, p. 17-18). In other words, the researcher chooses a case based on a certain time-period where a specific phenomenon of interest presents itself in a larger situation. George and Bennet describe a case as “an instance of a class event” meaning the relevant phenomenon such as “revolutions, types of government regimes, kinds of economic systems, or personality types” that the researcher deems worthy of investigation (2005, p. 17-18). In the context of this research the “class of events”, being the researchable phenomenon, are peacebuilding and OCGs and the specific case, being the chosen “historical event”, is Mali during the period of 2012-2022.



The analytical framework of the adaptive peacebuilding approach coined by Cedric De Coning (2018) will be used to analyse how international peacebuilders in Mali practice peacebuilding in relation to OCGs' role in the peacebuilding context. An extra focus will be on analysing whether international peacebuilders should use adaptive peacebuilding to adapt how they address OCGs in post-conflict and high-risk conflict countries in order to shift from liberal peacebuilding to a pragmatic form of peacebuilding that is envisioned by the international community and peace research scholars. In sum, the case study falls under the "heuristic" category as the researcher aims to identify "new variables" and "causal mechanisms and paths" to assist with future peacebuilding theory, practice and policy (George & Bennet 2005, p. 75). Simplified, the aim of this research is to improve the operationalization of pragmatic peacebuilding and enable sustained peace rather than illiberal peace by adding knowledge to the intricate situation of OCGs in peacebuilding contexts.

4.2 Case selection

For this research, Mali was chosen as the case due to the prevalence of OCGs and TOC as well as the presence of peacebuilders from the international community. Furthermore, Mali was chosen because of the volatile security situation making it a high-risk country for peacebuilders to work in. According to George and Bennet, a case should be selected based on the present 'subclass' which entails the desired researchable phenomenon. The case of Mali holds the 'subclass' of OCGs as well as the presence of the second subclass, international peacebuilding. Additionally, a case should be chosen to ensure control and variation of the research problem (George & Bennet 2005, p. 83). The choice of Mali presents a challenge due to the complexity of the conflict and security situation. Regardless, these aspects were deemed necessary to investigate what practices peacebuilding international peacebuilders implement in complex and crime-infested environments. Furthermore, research conducted on the security situation in Mali is abundant. However, the research is mainly connected to



counterterrorism or disassociated with peacebuilding. Research revolving OCGs and TOC in Mali (see e.g. Lacher 2012, Micallef et al. 2019 or Tinti 2022) does not investigate the prospect of improving peacebuilding in the complex and violent context of Mali. Instead, research investigating the prospect of building peace in a crime-prevalent context tends to focus on countries like Colombia (see e.g. Nilsson and Gonzálés Marín 2020) or El Salvador (see e.g. Wennmann 2014). Thus, Mali was chosen for its prevalence of OCGs, high insecurity and high presence of international peacebuilders.

Originally the cases of Liberia, Colombia and Libya were contemplated because they were deemed as part of the same ‘population of cases’. They all showcase similar variables and ‘subclasses’ as in the case of Mali making them part of the same population (George & Bennet 2005). In other words, they were deemed to have similar problems with OCGs and TOC negatively affecting peace and security, many international peacebuilders present, and a high-risk environment for peacebuilders. Ultimately out of the case population Mali was chosen after investigating previous research done on TOC and OCGs connected to international peacebuilding in all cases.

4.3 Sampling

The interview participants from UN MINUSMA and EUCAP Sahel Mali and the Swedish armed forces were contacted through the researcher’s personal network established during the UN exercise Viking22. Due to difficulties in finding appropriate participants, the researcher utilized LinkedIn and established contact with further personnel active in UN MINUSMA, EUCAP Sahel Mali and the Swedish armed forces. About half of the interviewees were recruited this way. The method of snowball sampling was used to in turn utilise the interviewee’s network to gather further interviews (Bryman 2016, p. 415). Essentially after the initial sampling of participants, they were asked whether they knew anyone fitting the set criteria for interviewees. They in turn suggested and gave contact information to the researcher upon



which other interviews could be conducted. Thus, the snowball effect culminated in 6 interviews in total. All participants are or have been active in the SSR process in Mali apart from 1 participant who represents the operative security of UN MINUSMA.

The interviews were conducted with international actors due to the nature of the research being focused on international peacebuilding and how it can operationalize pragmatic peacebuilding in relation to OCGs. The interviews were performed online via zoom and email in English.

4.4 Data collection

4 of the interviews were done orally clocking in at 44min, 1h 37min, 55min and 2h 50min respectively. Due to internet connection difficulties, 1 interview was written with a written follow-up session. The sixth interview was a written joint response from the EUCAP Sahel Mali mission by several experts at their SSR department.

All oral interviews were done via zoom and recorded with permission. The data was extracted via transcription and analysed. The written answers are taken strictly from the answers given and not tampered with to preserve the integrity of the answers. The questions were based on the themes “Peace and Security”, “Organized crime and criminal organizations” and “Cooperation with stakeholders”.

4.4.1 Formal application process

A formal application and letter to UN MINUSMA and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and Head of MINUSMA attached with a research ToR was sent by the researcher upon request. The application requested interviews with selected MINUSMA personnel who previously had agreed to participate when contacted. The application was approved, and proper conduct has been upheld in accordance with the application from the researcher and UN MINUSMA.



EUCAP Sahel Mali also received the ToR but an official application was not required.

4.5 Ethical consideration

This chapter introduces the ethical considerations taken for this research. Extra care was given to the participating individuals and institutions due to the sensitivity of the topic.

Consent

Interviewees were given an information and consent form (see appendix 2) detailing the purpose, intent, and method of the research as well as the usage and handling of data collected. In connection, the interviewees were given the interview-guide (see appendix 1). The documents were emailed to the participants at least 24h before the scheduled interview. Upon interview, the researcher went through the consent form, ensured the participant was informed and comfortable and asked for permission to record prior to recording. Confirmation of consent and integrity of withdrawal was documented prior to the interview.

Confidentiality

Participants were informed of the strict anonymity of the research. Their names or any personal information will not be shared or disclosed within or outside of the research. Participants are labelled as interviewee A, interviewee B etc. to ensure anonymity in accordance with social science ethics (NESH 2022). Care has been made to ensure participants cannot be identified in their professional role in such that it can negatively affect their career or current profession.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest from the author was found.



4.6 Limitations and Delimitations

This segment introduces the limitations and delimitations of this research.

4.6.1 Limitations

During the process of the study, the author faced difficulties in acquiring interviewees for the data pool. The author is aware of the small data pool collected which limits the scope of the research and the validity of its conclusions. In particular, the addition of more operative personnel from the international community active in Mali would have been beneficial and strengthened the research.

In correlation to the interviewees, another limitation of the research is the 'good will' shown by the interviewees. As the research is built around interviews it is also dependent on the interviewees sharing their experiences and opinions openly and without discrepancies. During the research, it became clear the sensitivity of the topic, organized crime and peacebuilding, created some tension and difficulties to acquire the needed information. Some interviewees did not wish to speak about organized crime at all (1 out of 6) and others preferred to speak about the more commonly accepted and internationally mandated problem in Mali, violent extremism and terrorism (5 out of 6). This has to some extent limited the research, but it should be noted that all interviewees were most gracious in their answers albeit sometimes a tad bit political or careful in their responses. Because of the sensitivity of the topic and the interviewees' professional positions, it is understandable that they were somewhat careful in their responses at times. However, it was noted by the author that throughout the interviews all interviewees formed a sense of trust in the author resulting in them opening up more. In conclusion, the validity of the research was affected by the small data pool but not by the quality of interviews acquired.

The language barrier was another limitation as the author does not speak the spoken language in Mali, French. As a result, the author was forced to



conduct her interviews in English. This meant that national and even more so local interviewees were difficult to obtain as many of them speak mainly French or another language foreign to the author. This meant that the author had to be selective in which interviewees to choose and also dictated the direction of the research to a certain extent.

4.6.2 Delimitations

The author chose to focus on international peacebuilders because of the language barrier. This enabled the author to research the chosen topic albeit having to abandon the interesting national and local perspectives.

Furthermore, due to the language barrier, the author could not include local scholars' research to the extent she desired.

Because of the security situation in Mali and the high risk of kidnapping and more, the author chose to conduct interviews online with personnel in Bamako and around the globe. As can be understood this means the author again chose to focus on international actors over national and local Malians. This does not mean, however, that all interviewees are Westerners.

5 Everlasting unstable Mali?

This chapter presents an introduction to Mali's struggle with instability, insecurity and the prevalence of organized crime.

5.1 Mali, how did we end up here?

Mali has since long been a country plagued by poverty, weak governance, and aid dependency. The country has suffered several coups since its independence in 1960 followed by repetitive armed violence and faced repeated shocks of ethnic-based insurgencies since the 1990s (Raineri & Strazzari 2022, p. 224-225; Micallef et al. 2019, p. 5).

The fragility of the state and repeated shocks to its institutions has created a frail country with low human capital and opportunities. The Human



Development Index of 2019 defined Mali as a low human development country at 184 out of 189 countries (UNDP 2020, p. 345). Furthermore, real GDP has continued to stagnate, and the national poverty rate is a striking 44.4% as of 2022 with increasing poverty rates up to 55% in high conflict-affected areas (World Bank 2022). Showcasing the lack of human capital and opportunities given in Mali caused by a weak state, donor-dependency, and conflict. Further strengthened by the high levels of corruption where Mali rank 136 out of 180 countries with a score of 29/100 on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index of 2021 (Transparency International 2021).

Mali is known for its security issues with the prevalence of violent extremism and terrorism, and transnational organized crime (TOC). The recorded ties between political elites, armed groups, and terrorists to organized crime have caused concern for the international community. Coincidentally the ties between organized crime and the aforementioned actors have been linked to conflict (Micallef et al. 2019; Lacher 2012; Tinti 2022; UNODC 2013, p. 10). Problems with poverty and weak state institutions in the northern, central and eastern parts of Mali have further destabilized the country's resilience against crime. The risk of radicalization into armed groups and violent extremism has increased due to a lack of opportunities and perceived in-group marginalization (Gunnarson, p. 24-25; 33).

In 2012 mainly Tuareg insurgencies started in northern Mali and quickly escalated into a military offensive toward the capital. Among the insurgencies, aiming to alleviate their marginalization, radical Islamist groups seized opportunities to form an uneasy collaboration with the Tuareg insurgency group MNLA (Tinti 2022, p. 5). Amid chaos, a military coup dethroned the longstanding government of Mali, replacing it with a transition government (ICG 2022). Resulting in a multileveled crisis drawing the eyes and concern of the international community. With former colonial ruler France in the forefront, the Security Council authorized by the end of 2012 an AU military intervention to prevent the country from falling further into



disarray (UN Security Council 2012, p. 4; Welz 2022a, p. 287). Only for France to circumvent the AU by request from the transitioning Malian authorities in January 2013 with Operation Serval (since 2014 replaced by Operation Barkhane). Operation Serval aimed to secure the Malian government against Islamist terrorists who were collaborating with the Tuareg insurgents escalating from the north (Micallef et al. 2019, p. 7; Welz 2022a; UN Security Council 2013). Evidently, the French military intervention had normative goals of counterterrorism coloured by French interests to prevent a state influenced by radical Islam. An interest seemingly shared by the international community based on the *Security Council Resolution 2100* held later that year which emphasised the threat of terrorism. It even went so far as to complement the French intervention in Mali (UN Security Council 2013, p. 1).

The same resolution authorized one of the deadliest UN peacekeeping missions in history, the *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali* (MINUSMA). It was deployed in June 2013 and had by 2019 lost 201 peacekeepers because of mainly jihadist violence (UN Security Council 2013; Micallef et al. 2019, p. 7) and in 2021 recorded 1 195 attacks on civilians and 1 880 human rights violations (Vermeij et al. 2022, p. 81-82).

The result of MINUSMA and Operation Serval and Barkhane has been a decrease in security and a higher prevalence of violent extremist groups and violence. That in turn has spread from the north to central and eastern parts of Mali (Gunnarson 2020, p. 7). Hence, the military interventions by the international community aimed at increasing security, counterterrorism, and supporting the development and peace in Mali have been unsuccessful. Resulting in the increased spatial room for organized criminal groups (OCGs) given the known problems of organized crime in Mali (Tinti 2022; Micallef et al. 2019; UNODC 2013; Kfir 2018; Briscoe 2014), the crime-conflict nexus (Steenkamp 2017; Cockayne & Lupel 2009) and the crime-terror nexus (Makarenko 2004; Hutchinson & O'Malley 2007; Shelley &



Melzer 2008; Raineri & Strazzari 2022). Moreover, research shows that structural and cultural violence has increased and furthered the conflict since 2012 (Gunnarson 2020). The increase of structurally and culturally based grievances erupting in violence is another indication of the dire situation for the Malian population. It is also directly connected to the increasingly complex conflict environment instigated in 2012. As security expenditures have increased from 8.4% of public expenditures to 20% during the years since 2012, representing over 3% of GDP (World Bank 2022, p. 33). Hence, Mali has for the past 20 years channelled expenditures from needed development projects to the military. The increase in violence, many requiring socio-economic interventions, is linked to the focus on stabilization and security, which, however, has not resulted in increased security or stabilization. As explained in this segment HRV against the public is common and violence has spread from the north into most of the country. The central parts of Mali currently being the most affected by violence albeit it was fairly spared back in 2012 and 2013.

5.2 Peace and Security

After the conflict escalation in 2012, Mali witnessed an inflow of foreign militant and civilian actors aimed at securing peace and security. Due to the violent conflict, [liberal] peace was a natural start and, thus, efforts at peacemaking were initiated. Quickly the root causes and colonial history showcased the sensitivity of Western actors' involvement. In particular, France as one of the primary mediators proved problematic (Davis 2015, p. 269). Perhaps not solely because of the colonial history but also due to the peace agreement from 2013 between the transition government of Mali and two prolific Tuareg armed groups the *Coordination of the Azawad National Liberation Movement* (MNLA) and the *High Council for the Unity of Azawad* (HCUA) (The National Unity Government of Transition of the Republic of Mali, MNLA & HCUA 2013) which excluded some armed groups and actors. Culminating in continued conflict (Davis 2015, p. 269).



Nonetheless, Algeria presented itself as a mediator, supported by MINUSMA and high-profiling countries such as France and the USA, and initiated peace negotiations with the conflict parties in 2014. As indicated, by then the conflict had an array of armed groups involved in the armed struggle. Many of whom received a seat at the table to amend previous mistakes (Nyirabikali 2016, p. 179-180). Algeria successfully mediated a peace between the parties and the '*Accord Pour la Paix et la Reconciliation au Mali*' (Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali) was signed in 2015 (Eickhoff 2021, p. 390; Gunnarson 2020, p. 15). Since then, attempts to fully implement the peace agreement have been made repeatedly albeit with poor results. Depending on who is asked the reason for its hampering implementation differs. Some argue the national government of Mali is not invested (Marsh & Rolandsen 2021; Eickhoff 2021; Vermeij et al. 2022, p. 100-102), while others claim it is due to heightened insecurity and the prevalence of violent extremism (Vermeij et al. 2022), and some argue it is due to the root causes of the conflict not being properly addressed (Kfir 2018; Gunnarson 2020).

What can be declared is that Mali still faces significant organized violence perpetrated by national security forces, non-state armed groups, organized criminal groups and violent extremist and terrorist groups. Hence, peace is still eluding Mali and so does security. As a natural effect so does development.

5.2.1 Coup of 2020 and 2021

In 2020 Mali was struck by yet another military coup, toppling President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and inserting a mainly civilian government. However, the grievances caused by militant marionetting of the government erupted in another military coup in 2021. The new transitional government consisted of Colonel Assimi Goïta as interim president and Choguel Kokalla Maïga as prime minister. The current transitional government of 2021 has followed Maïga's strong anti-western policy. Frustrations from the failure of



stabilizing and increasing security from the international community led by France and MINUSMA have been labelled as reasons (ICG 2022). Instead, the transitional government has turned their hopes to Russia and the Wagner Group to fill the shoes of France and the West (Elischer 2022; ICG 2022; ISS 2022).

The last 2 years of coups and dramatic changes in foreign policy have further complicated the political field in Mali. The transitional government's move away from cooperating with previously prominent international actors such as MINUSMA and inviting the Russian Wagner Group to Mali is arguably one of the most disruptive changes for international peacebuilders. This is not to say collaboration has seized with MINUSMA and the respective international community (Interviewees A, C and B). Conversely, the national government argues for its right to seek assistance elsewhere when MINUSMA, France, the EU and other international actors have failed to assist Mali to reach peace and security (Interviewees B, C and D). An argument that in light of the current situation is hard to refute. Yet humanitarian and right-based concerns are in order given the known human rights abuses such as torture, killings and violent intimidation of the Wagner Group (OHCHR 2021; Human rights watch 2022a; Human rights watch 2022b) including recent reports of the killing of 300 civilian men in the central Malian city of Moura by Mali and Wagner troops (Petesch & Imray 2022; Human rights watch 2022c). Since the Wagner Groups invitation to Mali 71% of the private military company's (PMC) involvement in political violence has been targeted at civilians. Accounting for more civilian targeting than both national security forces and non-state armed groups.

In other words, there are concerns regarding whether the change of strategy is going to benefit Mali's situation with peace and security. That is, whether Mali will benefit from their aspired illiberal peace through ACM remains to be seen. Essentially the question remains on whether the new illiberal peacebuilding approach will garnish security. Even more so if it will promote sustainable peace in such a fragile and crime-prevalent environment.



5.3 Mali and Transnational Organized Crime

Mali has a high prevalence of transnational organized crime (TOC) and organized criminal groups (OCGs). The UN emphasised on 29 June 2022 the need to combat TOC, terrorism connected to TOC and armed groups in Mali (UN Security Council 2022). Likewise, the fragility of the state has led to a prolific environment for violent extremist and terrorist groups. In turn, violent extremists and terrorist groups such as JNIM and AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) have indulged in criminal activities such as kidnapping, drug trafficking and arms trafficking to finance their political goals (Tinti 2022; Lacher 2012; Micallef et al. 2019; Cantens & Raballand 2016).

The existence of TOC in Mali stems back to the 1960s but saw an escalation in the 1970-80s. In the 90's hashish followed by cocaine trafficking increased and since the 2010's the prevalence of TOC – mainly drugs, human, and arms trafficking and artisanal gold exploitation – has increased (Micallef et al. 2019, p. x-xi). Furthermore, due to the thousand-year-old traditional Arab routes going through the country illicit trafficking and interlinked mercenary work by armed groups have been prolific (Lacher 2012; Micallef et al. 2019).

As a result, violence and instability persist in Mali. The violence and criminal activity spill over into neighbouring countries of e.g. Burkina Faso, Algeria and Niger (Lopez Lucia 2018, p. 675). Moreover, TOC in Mali has had effects on Europe as well. Hence, the situation in Mali has been regarded by the international community as an issue of international security due to the existence of TOC and terrorism (UN Security Council 2022; 2019; 2013).

With the 2012 crisis, the concerns for the stability of Mali, the Sahel region and the safety of Europe became a concern for the international community culminating in the French-led military intervention. Firstly, through Operation Serval in 2013, then with Operation Barkhane in 2014, and lastly



with the regionalized G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) in 2017. However, as of June 2022, France and its allied forces are leaving Mali for redeployment in other G5 Sahel countries due to Malian discontent (BBC 2022; ICG 2022). The Swedish Armed Forces are scheduled for a full withdrawal in June 2023 (Försvarsmakten 2022). Left are the MINUSMA's peacekeeping forces, the Mali armed forces, the Russian PMC the Wagner Group and the neighbouring presence of FC-G5S from which Mali has withdrawn.

In conclusion, Mali is facing a major security threat from TOC and the space left for OCGs. The choice of illiberal peacebuilding and civilian targeting by joint Malian security forces and the Wagner Group interventions remains to be seen. The fact however that liberal peacebuilding albeit in an attempt at pragmatism has not resolved the security issues and prevalence of TOC in Mali is evident. The upcoming chapter will present the findings of the study to evaluate how the current international peacebuilding can adapt further regarding the increase of OCGs.

6 Results and analysis

This chapter introduces the findings of the study and its analysis.

The chapter structure follows an introduction to how international peacebuilders address the role and impact of OCGs in Mali, a dive into local ownership and participation in the Mali peacebuilding process and an investigation into which type of peacebuilding is practised in Mali.

6.1 Organized Criminal Groups, Terrorism and Organized Crime

The findings suggest that international peacebuilders in Mali do not consider OCGs to be the biggest concern in Mali based on all interviewee's shared opinion that terrorism is the main problem of organized crime in Mali. They stress how the impact of terrorism and other armed groups on the Malian state, the public and, thus, the stability of Mali is greater than that of OCGs.



With this knowledge, the focus from the interviewees would, according to adaptive peacebuilding, suggest difficulties to adapt to the uncertainty of the conflict and social systems in Mali.

According to interviewee E, OCGs are present in a country with or without a security crisis such as the one in Mali. They continue to argue terrorists and armed groups weaken the state which enables further criminal activities. According to 5 out of 6 interviewees the OCGs finance and support terrorism through for example kidnappings, forced taxation, banditry, cattle theft, looting and various illicit trafficking (Interviewees A, B, C, E and F). Interviewees A, B, C, E and F highlight cross-border criminal activity such as human and drug trafficking, which they argue coincides with terrorist activity.

Interviewee E confirms the other interviewees' implications, arguing that OCGs are impossible to distinguish from other criminal groups in Mali:

“OCGs are clearly distinguished from terrorist or armed groups, but this is not applicable in the case of Mali where these two categories are practically confused.”

They are backed up by Interviewee B:

”oh...well, as I said, it is difficult to know what is organized crime, what is terrorism and what is, well, paramilitary organizations that are present in the area.”

According to the adaptive peacebuilding approach, this is a clear-cut case of uncertainty that international peacebuilders should adapt to. Based on the quotes above and the overall findings of this study, international peacebuilders in Mali find it hard to adapt to the uncertainty caused by the difficulties to distinguish OCGs from terrorist groups and other forms of criminal organizations. The findings also suggest that international peacebuilders in Mali view TOC and OCGs from a traditional Western



perspective where the need to ‘solve the problem’ of organized crime should be the focus. The adaptive peacebuilding approach would refute this because it argues the focus laid on ‘solutions to problems’ to enable ‘end goals’ for peacebuilding is contra productive. It makes this argument because social systems are everchanging and peace is essentially created from within social systems in crime-affected local communities. As such the adaptive peacebuilding approach would argue international peacebuilders in Mali should instead focus on the ‘means of institutional change’ to foster a more resilient peacebuilding process. In other words, instead of focusing on the problem caused by terrorism, they should focus on the change occurring within the context of Mali.

On another note Interviewee B also highlights the perspective of the transitional government and the state’s issue of safeguarding resources from TOC:

“The Malian Minister for Defense said at one point: ‘the thing is, the UN cannot create the security you speak of in this country’, and I [Interviewee B, Ed.] share this view, but there are multiple reasons behind it. [The Minister also said, Ed.] ‘that is why we must have something else than the EU and France to create security for our people’, and that is why they have chosen to invite the Wagner Group to, in particular, protect the state leadership and certain resources. That is certain mines around the area of Bamako.”

The issue of OCGs controlling mines in Mali was brought up as an incentive for the Malian government to move away from the Western ideals of conflict management and governance, in order to ensure resources would benefit the Malian economy by using the Wagner Groups’ more authoritarian approach. Coincidentally Interviewee C shared how gold mines controlled by OCGs offer illicit and dangerous livelihoods for unemployed youth. This indicates that OCGs can profit from natural resources while simultaneously gaining access to vulnerable youths.



At the same time, interviewee B explained the political incentives of ensuring the status quo of OCGs and armed groups as they are used by the political elite to safeguard their political power. As the OCGs control the mines but also have connections with the political elite since before the 1980s, parts of the transitional government and regional politicians do not want the OCGs to lose control of the mines. Instead, they want to continue to utilize the OCGs and armed groups for their political and financial gains. Interviewee B display concern about where resources come from and insinuate connections beyond that of criminal groups:

"Mali exports more gold than they mine. That raises the question of where this comes from. But unfortunately we know that a lot of drugs, trafficking and gems are moved through Mali, and that is of course something these terrorists and organized criminal groups benefit from."

Applying the adaptive peacebuilding approach to these findings suggests that international peacebuilders in Mali are acutely aware of the uncertainty caused by OCGs as well as changes occurring for local individuals and groups. However, they also showcase how the international peacebuilders seem at a loss of how to handle the complex situation, especially when they cannot clearly define a criminal group specifically as an OCG. This can be seen in how they prefer to discuss the more easily definable terrorist groups instead. The adaptive peacebuilding approach would suggest that the peacebuilders fully acknowledge the changes related to OCGs with an open mindset not controlled by previous 'best practices' and 'lessons learned' from how to combat OCGs. Instead, the approach argues for the prevention of radicalization into organized crime through structural engagement with the affected locals and relevant national stakeholders to enable institutional learning within the affected local systems.

Prevention of radicalization into organized crime was found by the study reported by Interviewees A, C, E and F, which coincides with adaptive



peacebuilding's concept of working with change instead of against conflict. In other words, the understanding of that peacebuilders cannot always solve problems, and instead should try and create institutional change, is present among international peacebuilders in Mali. However, Interviewees A, C, E and F all presented prevention and deradicalization efforts aimed at radicalization into violent extremism and terrorism. In other words, despite the fact individuals are radicalized into OCGs as well, this study could not find support for any preventative measures taken by the international peacebuilding community regarding recruitment to OCGs. Thus, according to the adaptive peacebuilding approach, given that international peacebuilders are aware of the presence of OCGs, a widened scope of prevention initiatives according to the monitored changes in Mali would be beneficial to better enable a more secure livelihood and environment for especially the vulnerable youths.

The complexity of organized crime and OCGs in Mali is further showcased by how 1 interviewee was reluctant to answer questions regarding organized crime and OCGs due to 'topic sensitivity' (Interviewee D) and the preference to discuss violent extremism and terrorism by the remaining interviewees (Interviewee A, B, C, E and F). It also indicates that OCGs are down-prioritized, as they are deemed less of a threat compared to terrorists and armed groups. This is despite the testimonies of OCG activity and their effect on state authority and public safety showcased by interviewee F:

“Trafficking and organized crime have consequences both for the security of individuals and for the authority of the state. It creates a kind of 'alternative' sovereignty in some parts of the country, which means that resources, taxes, jobs, [and] markets can be controlled by organized crime networks, sometimes with the complicity of TAG², depriving the state of important fiscal resources.”

² Terrorist Armed Group



Interviewee F shares Interviewee B's view on how resources are controlled by OCGs. They also support Interviewee A, C and E's sentiment on OCGs' impact on livelihoods through e.g. control of jobs and taxes. The control of markets is further supported by Interviewee B:

"Even at markets, those markets where you can buy your grain or what you need to grow crops or for your animals. Then organized crime is there to buy everything beforehand or threaten the people with violence unless they allow the organized criminal groups access."

The question then becomes: whose needs and interests are taken into consideration and when is the violence and activities performed by OCGs down-prioritized? Considering how they actively engage and feed criminal activity and violence perpetuated by terrorist and armed groups, it seems of interest to address what arguably is a source of the problem. Moreover, this study finds that the interests and concerns of local communities most affected by all groups' violence are not adequately included in decision-making on OCGs. This is indicated by Interviewee B's testimony on difficulties for civilian peacebuilders to interact with local communities:

"What we did [as opposed to the UN who stay in camps and monitor themselves, unable to move freely due to the insecurity, Ed.] with the Swedish unit, was that we spent a lot, a lot, more time out in the field meeting and interacting with the local population where they live and work. And then we integrated a lot with leaders, informal and formal leaders in the villages."

Interviewee B highlights the issue international peacebuilders in Mali have in implementing structured engagement and creating institutional learning that in turn can lead to locally owned sustained peace. It also indicates a problem with local participation that according to the adaptive peacebuilding approach is detrimental to supporting sustained peace.



Going back to what Interviewees B and F indicated above, OCGs enter markets and either through coercion, intimidation or violence ensure the market's resources benefit the criminal network. Once more it is made clear that terrorist groups sometimes support these criminal activities for mutual benefit. Furthermore, it is clear, based on these findings, that OCGs are not indistinguishable from terrorists and armed groups, which was suggested by Interviewee E. This sentiment is also supported by the interviewees' focus on terrorism and reluctance to discuss OCGs. In other words, the conclusion that international peacebuilders are aware of OCG activity in Mali, but struggle to adapt to the contextual uncertainty created by the existence of OCGs, terrorist groups and other armed groups, is strengthened. If we apply the emphasis on local ownership and local participation found in the adaptive peacebuilding approach, then these findings suggest that international peacebuilders in Mali find it difficult to incorporate local communities affected by organized crime perpetuated by OCGs. Based on the findings it seems this struggle is connected to the difficulties of identifying OCGs, but also to the mandates given to the international peacebuilders by the international community (the UN and the EU) since they emphasize violent extremism, terrorism and armed groups over OCGs. However, the mandates from the international community are strongly connected to stabilization and counterterrorism which research suggests is detrimental to peacebuilding. The findings, combined with this knowledge, imply that international peacebuilders in Mali are driven by mandates that are not conducive to adaptive peacebuilding since it advocates local ownership and local participation. According to adaptive peacebuilding, to strengthen international peacebuilding in Mali the peacebuilders should focus on structured engagement. That means systematically engaging, with the local communities affected by OCGs to incorporate their needs, interests and objectives in the entire iterative adaptive process of peacebuilding. This would, theoretically, enable stronger local ownership through increased local participation since the interests, needs and objectives of the owners of the intended peace are incorporated. Furthermore, this would, according to the



approach, enable the institutional learning that adaptive peacebuilding advocates.

Furthermore, as mentioned all interviewees agree terrorism is the primary concern in Mali and Interviewee A states it is the main source of OC in Mali due to spatial opportunities for TOC. A notion agreed upon by several interviewees (Interviewees B, C, E and F). This strong focus, in combination with an international perspective on terrorism and TOC, may result in an inflexibility towards the pragmatic issues for peace. In other words, the aforementioned shift of focus from the cause and possible solution of conflict towards the actual changes and circumstances of the witnessed crime-terror nexus is argued by the adaptive peacebuilding approach to achieve security and sustained peace. Based on Interviewee A's accounts, there is a lack of acknowledgement of the 'never-ending cycle of change'. The idea that terrorists will always be the main context of organized crime in Mali, as it has been viewed by the international community since 2012, is not conducive to the adaptive peacebuilding approach. The approach, instead, would argue an openness to how changes always occur and never stops. This means that the best practices utilized against organized crime, with a focus on terrorism, may not be the best course of action now. An argument that is further indicated by the increase in TOC, violent extremism and terrorism in Mali despite 9 years of counterterrorism, combined with counterinsurgencies against cross-border trafficking. The past 9 years of viewing terrorism as the main problem and OCGs as the 'lesser' problem may be hindering stability and peace in Mali according to the findings of this study.

Applying the adaptive peacebuilding approach's emphasis on the need to shift focus from 'the end goals' to the 'means' of peacebuilding, the analysis made is that international peacebuilding in Mali struggles to shift the focus and is stuck in 'the end goals' of peacebuilding. In other words, the idea that peacebuilding will result in a sustainable, liberal peace compared to a sustained, pragmatic peace. This would mean that international peacebuilders in Mali are affected by a poorly constructed pragmatic peacebuilding



doctrine and would benefit from adopting the adaptive peacebuilding approach instead. The focus should ideally be shifted from the problem of terrorism (the idea of solving the problem and reaching the ‘end goal’) to the contextual situation of local social systems. Here the peacebuilders can tap into and support the pre-existing changes occurring (the ‘means’ for peace that acknowledge the need for continued efforts at sustaining the peace).

In conclusion, the international peacebuilding community in Mali still views peace from a liberal doctrine and struggles to adapt to the increasing presence of OCGs. In essence, the perspective on OCGs is that they must be combatted and prevented to ensure peace as it causes violence. This study acknowledges how the violence perpetuated by OCGs is problematic and does not refute their negative impact on the Mali population and society. It also acknowledges that a Western ideal of TOC and rule of law is not wrong or decidedly detrimental to peacebuilding.

Interviewee D shared their perception of post-colonial tendencies within the international community in Mali:

“You [the international actor, Ed.] cannot be more concerned by the faith of the people of a country more than those people and those who are responsible for it [the government of Mali, Ed.]. Beyond whatever we may think. It sounds like me being more concerned about the Swedish more than the Swedish government.”

Their statement indicates a mentality of ‘preconceived knowledge’, mentioned by the adaptive peacebuilding approach as non-existent and a component of poor peacebuilding. In other words, Interviewee D’s addition highlights how the international peacebuilding community in Mali seem to consider they know better than the ‘owners of peace’, meaning the Malian people at its leaders. This again suggests a dissonance with local ownership in the peacebuilding process in Mali and indicates a top-down linear aspect of peacebuilding found in liberal peacebuilding.



Interviewee C shared a situation that showcased the linear peacebuilding and lack of local participation indicated above. According to Interviewee C, the terrorist coalition JNIM took over Gao in 2012, before Operation Barkhane recaptured the city for the Malian state. According to Interviewee C, the locals in Gao explained how JNIM provided them with electricity, water and other basic needs which the state could not. At the time of this interview in 2022, Interviewee C could confirm locals in Gao still argue that the state cannot provide what JNIM could: *“if JNIM could provide for us, why can’t the state?”* is apparently a commonly asked question among Gao locals.

In other words, Interviewee C shared how the centralization and lack of state authority in Mali have created room for the informal criminal sector to provide basic needs the Mali state cannot. The Mali state is then perceived, by some, as less capable and trustworthy in this regard. Moreover, the Mali state and international troops can be perceived as disrupting locals’ way of life, even survival, when they attempt to remove OCGs and terrorist groups from communities.

A disconnected international community

The findings indicate an abstract view of the context of Mali when it comes to organized crime. In fact, Mali seem to generally be analyzed from a table far away from the areas most affected by the conflict and violence perpetuated by organized crime:

“More assessments that were made at a higher abstract level, that these are the challenges down here. We ourselves did not do any raids, if one can call it that, or ended up in contact with it [organized crime, Ed.]. It was more on a higher abstract level where one looks at Mali as an entity.” – Interviewee B

Conversely, civil UN personnel clearly venture out, when possible, to local communities to find partners. As indicated by the UN-supported youth deradicalization hostels mentioned by Interviewee C:



“Suddenly there is a policy on the prevention of counterviolence extremism. Based on the same national policy which was endorsed by the [Mali, Ed.] government, MINUSMA supported the construction of youth hostels in the Center and North [of Mali, Ed.]. In the Center it was Mopti and north it was Gao. So these centers are created to deradicalize youth.”

And the successful mediation mentioned by Interviewee F:

“National authorities are active in the mediation among communities with a view to promoting reconciliation and preventing intercommunal violence. The United Nations and some international non-governmental organizations, such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, facilitated these efforts, enabling the signing of numerous inter-community agreements particularly in central Mali.”

However, it is questionable how well-integrated the local communities are in the intervention processes and decisions made on matters directly affecting them. For instance, the hostels were initiated by the Mali national policy on counterviolence extremism which suggests local stakeholders were not the primary partners and potentially not included at all (Interviewee C).

The hostels mentioned by Interviewee C, for instance, took in specialized people following ideas of inclusion. Among others, imams were incorporated to meet the needs and interests of the radicalized youth. However, according to interviewee C, since the transitional government took over nothing has come out of the hostel centers. In other words, the nationally led policy on counterviolence extremism seems to not be prioritized by the new transitional government resulting in the hostels falling apart since they were led by Mali authorities and supported by MINUSMA. Based on this information, it seems like local stakeholders were not involved in the process



of the hostel intervention which both the previous Mali government and MINUSMA failed to recognize.

Therefore, it is this thesis' analysis that the intervention most likely failed, in part, because of an abstract analysis made without the involvement of the affected locals during the entire process. The adaptive peacebuilding approach would suggest that if the previous government and MINUSMA had involved local stakeholders in the iterative process of the intervention, then the likelihood that local social institutions would have kept the hostels alive would have been higher. In other words, had MINUSMA applied adaptive peacebuilding they would have used structured engagement to make the social institutions resilient to violent conflict. They would also have supported institutional learning to foster sustained peace by incorporating the local actors into the entire iterative adaptive process of the intervention. In other words, the sustainability and resilience of the intervention were hampered due to the lackluster incorporation of the affected local community. Thus, the sentiments given by interviewee B and C, supported by the high-dialogue concentration witnessed among the remaining interviewees (apart from Interviewee D), leads this study to the conclusion that peacebuilding in Mali suffers from an abstract analysis made by international actors that follow a best practice approach on how to deal with conflicts and organized crime. The findings also showcase how these best practices are predominantly aimed at violent extremism and terrorism prevention and OCGs are not prioritized. The apparent focus on pre-determined interventions based on best practices and lessons learned is, according to the adaptive peacebuilding approach, the opposite of what international peacebuilders should do.

6.2 Poor civil-military cooperation and weakened local ownership

Interviewee B perceived cooperation between stakeholders in Mali to be underperforming:



"[Cooperation is, Ed.] far too bad. We held weekly long meetings with the different military organizations, that is the Mali armed forces, the French armed forces, the French operation, all the organs of the UN mission and I talked quite a bit with the head of office, that is for the civilian part up there."

Interviewee B's impression contradicts that of the remaining interviewees which states cooperation works fine, albeit with room for improvement. The remaining interviewees either dodged this question or blamed the lack of cooperation on the security issues, often referring to the lack of cooperation with local and regional stakeholders. However, interviewee B's testimony is of interest given how they explain the issue of cooperation between national stakeholders and international actors, including that of the UN civilian head of office for MINUSMA. Furthermore, the lack of cooperation with local stakeholders indicated by other interviewees is linked by interviewee B to the poor cooperation among international actors and between international actors and national stakeholders:

"The cooperation suffers as well when one speaks with the civilians, that is, the local stakeholders, with the governor and village elder and so on."

The findings elaborate on the top-down and abstract approach of the international community in Mali considering interviewee B's testimony:

"On the highest UN level, there they have good dialogues between the head of the military, the head of the civil unit, the country's government. [...] But they can have as many good dialogues as they wish. If it does not work farthest out on the line, then..."

This suggests how the civilian part of international peacebuilding in Mali works mainly on a dialogue basis with stakeholders in and around Bamako, while the tactical and operative part of the international intervention is struggling. This implies that the peacebuilding process, as indicated by



interviewee B, remains centralized in Bamako and fails to engage operatively in local and regional parts of Mali where the most conflict-affected reside. Again the findings suggest that local participation and institutional learning is underperforming in Mali according to the preferences of adaptive peacebuilding. This means that the interests and needs of local communities affected by OCGs are not brought into the analysis and decision-making through the entire international peacebuilding process. According to adaptive peacebuilding, this would mean the international peacebuilding in Mali cannot support the ‘peace from within’ and assist locally owned sustained peace which the approach argues is needed to achieve it. What we can conclude, then, is that international peacebuilding in Mali, according to the adaptive peacebuilding approach, does not practice more pragmatic peacebuilding and instead follow more liberal practices.

As interviewee C and A dictates the security situation hampers collaboration between the international peacebuilding community and regional and local stakeholders. Interviewee B agrees, but also highlights the low interaction and thereby collaboration between the military part of MINUSMA and the civilian MINUSMA departments and the civil departments of Mali. Considering the findings suggesting how civilian personnel cannot leave Bamako due to security risks this indicates a problematic communication error within MINUSMA (Interviewees A, B, C and E). Interviewee C, supported albeit more delicately by Interviewee A and E, mentions how lack of access hinders civilian interventions. This communication error thus leads to issues with deploying tactical UN personnel to areas that civilian personnel desire to enter shortly to perform intended interventions for peace and security. Interviewee B perceives a lacking communication with tactical personnel on which areas should be monitored and secured to ensure security for civilian personnel which can be summarized in this quote:

“So one can create security at the right place at the right time”.



Interviewee B continues to explain how they would be deployed to one area and then later hear of how their presence in another part of their appointed region would have enabled planned civilian activity. But since they were not present the civilian activity had to be postponed due to security risks.

Interviewee B argued how better communication with operative peacekeepers would enable better implementation of civil interventions which is supported by Interviewee C's information.

In conclusion, interviewee B argued for better civil-military cooperation within the international community. They were inadvertently supported by Interviewees A and C since they corroborated Interviewee B's information about how civilian interventions were hindered due to military personnel not having secured the area. Interviewee E also supported Interviewee B in that better civil-military cooperation is needed to improve the international community's interventions.

6.3 Liberal, adaptive or pragmatic?

The findings conclude that 5 out of 6 interviewees, to some level, consider the Malian government(s) to not take or have taken their anticipated responsibility, as they all reference the national government's responsibility to its people as indicated by the following quotes:

"One does not take the responsibility expected of the politicians of the country on one's shoulders. France does not understand why they should be there [in Mali] and create security when they [the Malian government] do not even seem to want it on the highest political level in the country" – Interviewee B.

And:

"With the withdrawal of [other international military support] and French forces so there's going to be a big security vacuum. Who is going to fill that security vacuum? Its government [Mali] is not going



to deploy its new partners so certainly this new area is going to be occupied by the jihadist or terrorist groups” – Interviewee C.

According to the adaptive peacebuilding approach, 5 out of 6 hold a strong liberal peacebuilding approach where Western ideals of good governance and rule of law dictate their perception. In other words, they seem to consider if a state does not follow Western-inspired governance and rule of law there is cause for concern.

The adaptive peacebuilding approach would question such a strictly liberal approach as it would argue that the local ownership would be damaged. At the same time, about half of the interviewees showcase an understanding of neo-colonialism and post-colonialism which may affect the Malian statehood showcased e.g. by Interviewee D:

“I’m talking about the Malians. They felt ‘oh what is this?’. This partner came to support us and on this [securing Mali, Ed.] they [international forces] are in a [forced position, Ed.]. At some point, you lose a little bit of confidence. ‘Is this person who came in to help me, actually working with me or it has its own agenda which does not fit with my own agenda?’. The French, they probably had their own reasons, I don’t know. But I’m just gonna interpret a little bit [of] the feelings and views of the Malians at the time.”.

This indicate an understanding of more pragmatic peacebuilding strategies of local ownership found in adaptive peacebuilding. Interviewee D recognized the need for international actors to be humble and attentive to local and national interests and perceptions. Applying adaptive peacebuilding, in terms of adherence to local ownership and not holding a preconception that international peacebuilders ‘know better’, it can be determined that the disarray of liberal peacebuilding and the lack of operationalized pragmatic peacebuilding is found within the international community in Mali.



The findings, thus, suggest the motivation and understanding for local participation and ownership as advocated by adaptive peacebuilding are there, but international peacebuilders are held back by the instability and insecurity in Mali. Conversely, they all are prone to use linear approaches and pre-determined activities based on 'best practices' and 'lessons learned' that goes strictly against adaptive peacebuilding. This thesis thus finds that international peacebuilders in Mali tend to rely and fall back on liberal peacebuilding practices of top-down and programmatic activities.

7 Conclusion – So what did you say about criminals and peace?

After reading this thesis, you have realized that the international peacebuilders in Mali do not speak or pay that much mind to OCGs. So, what has this research actually said about criminals and peace?

Well, this study has found that the international community in Mali considers the main criminals in Mali to be violent extremists and terrorists, soon followed by armed groups. When it comes to OCGs the international peacebuilders participating in this study either did not wish to discuss them or constantly highlighted how violent extremism and terrorism were the bigger issues and thus should be the main focus. The study cannot refute this claim and will not attempt to either. However, it will emphasise its findings of how the most affected local communities are not properly included in the analysis of their situation, the planning of activities aimed at their benefit or the implementation of said activities according to adaptive peacebuilding. Furthermore, the study showcase how they also are not included in the monitoring and evaluation of the activities. Instead, this study finds that international peacebuilders in Mali focus on national ownership over local ownership.



Naturally, the security situation in Mali makes it difficult for international peacebuilders to engage fully with local stakeholders to include them in every aspect of the intervention process. Thus, this research would benefit from continued research on how international peacebuilders engage local communities affected by OCGs in less high-risk contexts such as Mali. A suggestion is Liberia which currently has a more stable environment for international peacebuilders to work in. Further research in for example Colombia, where violent extremism and terrorism are less prevalent, would enable a better understanding of what role OCGs have in peacebuilding contexts and how pragmatic peacebuilding can be operationalized in a high-crime prevalent environment using the adaptive peacebuilding approach.

Still, the study concludes that the presence of OCGs in Mali is known by international peacebuilders. The problem is that due to the complex and dire security situation the international community as a whole struggle to differentiate criminal groups from each other. This is not new information and may be part of the reason why international peacebuilders are keener to focus on their mandates, which dictate violent extremism and terrorism as the primary focus regarding organized crime. However, this study has found that the confusion caused by the complex situation enables international peacebuilders to fall back on and rely on liberal peacebuilding practices. In other words, this study finds that international peacebuilding in Mali is mainly liberal, which makes it linear and inflexible when it comes to facing the uncertainty of OCGs in an already complex environment. In conclusion, the study finds that international peacebuilding in Mali is negatively affected by the lack of an operationalized pragmatic peacebuilding and would benefit from adopting the adaptive peacebuilding approaches ideas of local ownership of the peacebuilding process, accepting uncertainty as part of peacebuilding and shifting their focus from problem-solving to working with the changes within the contextual situation.

The study also found that the international community would benefit from better civil-military cooperation as it hinders civil peacebuilding



interventions. During the research, it came forth that civil peacebuilding personnel cannot enter large parts of Mali due to security risks. This means that the most affected communities cannot be properly reached nor included in interventions aimed at benefitting them. The study found how the civil personnel were acutely aware of the situation and instead found other means of conducting their mandate. The operative personnel were also aware of the situation but felt frustrated because they found their expertise and mandate were not properly utilized due to poor communication regarding where the civil personnel intended to go in Mali. The study found how this led to the operative personnel being sent to other regions in Mali and then soon after a civil intervention had to be postponed because the area they intended to visit was not secured.

As such this study concludes that peacebuilding in Mali would benefit from better civil-military cooperation to improve peacebuilding interventions and local participation in the entire peacebuilding process. Further research in similar cases or in Mali with a larger data pool is recommended. This research is recommended to be more aligned towards civil-military cooperation connected to peacebuilding and not focused on OCGs. While this research found how the difficulties of distinguishing and identifying the role of OCGs in Mali were further hampered by the poor civil-military cooperation, it recognizes the need to limit variables in the recommended research. This study found that because the cooperation between civilian and military personnel was not optimal, the local ownership of the peacebuilding process and their perspective of OCGs' impact on their communities were negatively affected.

Lastly, the study found that international peacebuilders in Mali use abstract analyses resulting in how the interests, needs and perspectives of the local communities are either not incorporated into peacebuilding initiatives or are used through the lens of an outsider. Coincidentally the study also found that all interviewees shared Western ideals of what constitutes TOC and rule of law. One interviewee addressed the neo-colonial tendencies of the



international community in Mali however they also did not discuss organized crime. As such the findings strongly suggest that international peacebuilding in Mali is mainly a top-down and linear approach. It was also noted by the research that international peacebuilders in Mali seem aware of the ideas of local ownership and other ideas from practical peacebuilding. The study can, however, conclude that they are held back by the current complex security situation and unable to fully distinguish OCGs from other criminal groups to the point where addressing OCGs is most difficult.

This study has added to the population of cases with a high prevalence of OCGs, high insecurity and high presence of international peacebuilders. It added to the peacebuilding research on how to operationalize peacebuilding, in this case population using the approach of adaptive peacebuilding. Further research on how adaptive peacebuilding can be used to operationalize the new pragmatic peacebuilding paradigm is recommended in Liberia to investigate a more stable environment. In a more stable environment, the adaptive peacebuilding approach may have better odds of being implemented successfully. Moreover, additional research into how adaptive peacebuilding can be applied to address OCGs in peacebuilding contexts is recommended to be done in Colombia because it has fewer problems with terrorism than Mali. Using Colombia as a case for a similar study could prove beneficial as international peacebuilders may be less implicated by the crime-terror nexus than they currently are in Mali.



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Appendix 1: Interview guide

Interview guide distributed to interviewees and used for interviews.

Interview guide Master's Thesis – Lisa Algotsson, Linnaeus University

General questions

- Nationality:
- Current country of residence:
- Age:
- Gender/sex:
- Profession:
 - Organization/institute/agency/company:
- Educational level:
- Field of study:
- Do you have previous experience with international missions?
 - Any from SSR?

Specific questions

Peace and Security:

- How would you describe the status/progress of peacebuilding in Mali?
- How would you describe the security situation in Mali?
- How has the national policy affected your line of work?
- What is your impression of SRR in Mali?
 - Who is included/excluded?
- Is violence part of peacebuilding efforts?
 - Why/Why not?
 - If yes, what type of violence is present?

Organized crime and criminal organizations:

- What type of organized crime would you say is the biggest problem in Mali?
 - Why?
- What is most important to address in relation to organized crime?



- How is combatting/preventing organized crime integrated with SSR in Mali?
- How is local Malian's security affected by organized crime?
- How are local Malian's livelihoods and economy affected by organized crime?
- How would you describe violence connected to organized crime?
 - How does said violence affect SSR in Mali?
- How would you define organized crime?

Cooperation with stakeholders:

- How would you describe the cooperation with stakeholders during your mission in Mali?
- How would you describe the situation between locals and international actors in Mali?
 - Please elaborate?

Backup questions:

- What would be a situation of security in Mali?
- What would be a situation of peace in Mali?

(Cooperation:)

- Have you cooperated with local civilians during your mission in Mali?
 - If yes, please elaborate on your experience?
 - If no, why not?
- During your mission in Mali, have you attempted dialogue with non-state armed groups within the scope of your mandate?
 - If yes, please elaborate on your experience?
 - If no, why not?
- During your mission in Mali, have you attempted dialogue with organized criminal groups and/or individuals within the scope of your mandate?
 - If yes, please elaborate on your experience.
 - If no, why not?



Appendix 2: Information and consent form

Information and consent form sent and presented to the interview participants.



Peace and Development Work Master's Thesis

Lisa Algotsson

You are hereby invited to participate in graduate research conducted by Lisa Algotsson, a student at Peace and Development Work, Linnæus University, Växjö, Sweden. Said research revolves around peacebuilding, security, and organized crime in Mali in connection to SSR. You have been asked to participate due to your expertise and experience with SSR and peacebuilding in Mali.

In this document, you will gain insight into the research and your rights as a voluntary participant. Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have any doubts or questions regarding your participation. Kindly observe that you have the full right to decline your participation and retract your consent at any time during the research up until 15 August 2022.

Goals of research,

The research aims to investigate the complex nature of organized crime and peacebuilding in Mali and how this affects the practice of international peacebuilding. Organized crime has been an increasing problem in Mali since around the 1980s and since 2012 has been addressed by international actors, aiming to enable security and stability in the country. Despite this violence against civilians has increased accompanied by decreased security in several regions of Mali. Hence this research aims to bring light to the complexity of building peace in a post-conflict country with organized crime, terrorism, weak state capacity, and dependency on international actors' support. This research will focus on the role of organized criminal groups (OCGs) in the peacebuilding context of Mali to support a better understanding of how international peacebuilding can cope with the increasing existence of OCGs in peacebuilding contexts. To narrow down the



research SSR was chosen. The chosen method is a single-case study with semi-structured interviews. The analytical framework the Adaptive Peacebuilding Approach by Cedric de Coning will be used to investigate its usage to operationalize pragmatic peacebuilding in relation to OCGs.

Participation,

As an interviewee you will partake in a semi-structured interview with themed questions 1) *Peace and Security*; 2) *Organized crime and criminal organizations* and 3) *Cooperation with stakeholders*. You will be asked to answer according to your own conscious and preferences with full consideration of your anonymity and individual perspective. The interview is estimated to last around 30-45 minutes.

Risks,

No physical or psychological risks are expected of the participant during the interview. The interviewer will take full regard for the interviewee's comfortability, autonomy, and integrity. The interviewee has the right to answer questions as they see fit and will receive no pressure or penalty in this regard. Extra thought has been put into the participant's profession in terms of how the questions have been formulated and regarding strict anonymity to protect the participant's professional integrity.

Benefits,

The participant will assist in research aimed at improving the operationalization of pragmatic peacebuilding in relation to highly insecure post-conflict countries with complexities revolving around organized crime and organized criminal groups. Upon completion and request by the participant, the researcher will make the study results available to you.

Anonymity,

The participant's identity will be strictly confidential during and after the research. No identifiable information will be shared with outsiders of the research to preserve your integrity. The finished product will have no identifiable information about any participants to preserve your integrity, both professional and private.

Data collection and protection,



Any data collected from/about the participant before, during and after the interview will be stored securely by the researcher. Upon completion of the research any data collected, including audio, video, and written, will be deleted within 6 months from 3 September 2022.

Contact,

If needed, please contact the researcher via email: lalcx09@student.lnu.se or [REDACTED] and phone: [REDACTED].

Free and informed consent,

I hereby give my full consent to participate in the research under the conditions explained above. I am aware that my consent was given freely, that my anonymity and integrity will be preserved and that I can retract my consent at any time until 15 August 2022.

Name: _____

Organization/agency: _____

Phone: _____

Email (optional): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

The researcher's responsibility,



I, Lisa Algotsson, hereby ensure that I will uphold the participant's full autonomy, integrity, and anonymity according to the aforementioned information and research ethic principles falling under:

- 1) Respect of persons autonomy and protecting those with diminished autonomy,
- 2) Justice,
- 3) Informed consent,
- 4) Confidentiality and protection of data,
- 5) Integrity,
- 6) Conflict of interest,

drawn from *The Belmont Report* and complimented by *The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) 2022 Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities*.

I also hereby ensure the availability of information and consent from the researcher to the participant.

Signature: _____ Date: _____